

ILL - STARRED

BABBIE

WILL W. WHALEN





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"DON'T RISK THAT BOARD."



# ILL-STARRED BABBIE

BY  
*W. W. Wilford*  
WILL W. WHALEN

Author of  
"THE LILY OF THE COAL FIELDS"



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TO  
JAMES J. WALSH, M. D., PH. D., L.L. D.,  
K. ST. G., AND EX-MINER.







ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
F. S. BRUNNER.







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## CHAPTER I.

### CROSSING THE RUBICON.

The sun was bright that Wednesday morning, but the air was keen. The frozen particles which the wind tossed about stung the face like tiny, spiteful insects.

Yet Babbie Conway's veil was raised. She was listening eagerly to the man at her side, a man handsome, with a coarse, sensual beauty. He drew the heavy covering closer about her, and she smiled, as the sleigh sped on.

They had been driving for about fifteen minutes, and now the horse was climbing the mountain that rose, like a Cyclops, outside the city of Farringdon. The sleigh moved along slowly. The man's blood was on fire, though the day was cold.

"But you will marry me, Babbie?" he pleaded, his steel-blue eyes fastened on her.

"I am so young," she faltered, "not yet sixteen, and you are nearly thirty."

"My years will be only the more perfection to you."



"My father and sisters would not like me to marry you, Conrad Miller. I had to fib and steal away to take this ride with you. If our Rose knew, she would follow me. But," with a laugh, "how I do like to tease her and pap! Poor Hannah never says a cross word to me."

"I can't bear that there queen of a sister of yours, that Rose; she always freezes me with them big eyes of hers. I pity the man what marries her; she's too airified. She ain't one-half as lovely as you."

"Don't you think so?" Babbie's cheek had a little more color in it. "Every one thinks Rose handsomer than I am. She's like a beautiful swan, I'm a crow. And education! she taught me all I know. When it comes to brain, Rose beats any girl at Farrington."

"No lie about that. But you kin talk as good as her. And if I had the pick between you and her, I would take you. Rose must have been born in the middle of the winter, and some of the snow got into her make-up; but you must've come with the spring, for you would win and melt down the hardest, coldest man's heart



that ever plumped his foot upon the earth."

He caught her hands and held them tight. How strong he was! She gloried in his strength. But she turned on him suddenly.

"You have been drinking," she said sharply, her arched brows coming together. "And you want me to spend my life with you, a man who swallows down beer on the day he asks a girl to marry him."

"But you will, you must, you've got to marry me."

"Must! I like that! You know Babbie Conway; don't try to scare her."

Her little head was high. The devil in him was aroused.

"You are aware that I am a desperate man. When a desperate man wants something, he's a-going to get it."

"You talk like a Jesse James. But you have some things to learn about me, Conrad Miller. I won't marry you."

She turned her face from him, and looked after a snowbird, whose little voice flowed back, "a never-frozen rill of melody."

The sleigh had reached the top of the



mountain. Far below, through the bare trees, the small village of Fairview could be seen. The road was steep and slippery. To the right was the precipitous mountain side, slanting almost half a mile, full of grinning rocks, decayed stumps, and towering trees.

Miller struck the horse with the whip, and she started off at a trot. She was a spirited little mare, and resented the undeserved cut. He threw the reins out of the sleigh, and slashed the horse three or four times with the whip. Babbie caught her lover's arm; there was a terrible light in his eyes.

"Heavens, Conrad! the horse is wild, is running away! Merciful God, we shall be dashed to pieces!"

The road was flowing along like a swift stream of water. She cast a frightened glance to the right. A shudder ran through her, and her brain reeled, as she saw the awful length of the mountain side down which she and her lover might be plunged any moment.

And never was life dearer than then. They were full of vigor and health, he





F. S. Brunner

‘ HEAVENS, CONRAD, THE HORSE IS WILD.’







and she, life had many years for them; why should they give up life now?

He took her in his arms and folded her close.

"We will die together!" he whispered fiercely. "You brought this on yourself; I ain't no man to be trifled with."

The mare was maddened by the cutter, which forced her along. Babbie clung to her lover; his strength gave her a little assurance.

The sleigh was sliding from the right to the left of the road; now on the very point of going down over the mountain side, now in the middle, now on the left of the road. A crash!

For an instant, Babbie was bewildered, her face and eyes full of snow. Then she was lifted very gently to her feet, and she felt an arm about her. Dazed, she looked down over the mountain side. Far below lay the horse and cutter. Conrad Miller limped painfully. With a great effort, he had thrown Babbie and himself out into the snow just as the sleigh went over.

He spoke. "A close shave you had at the hands of a madman, Babbie. You



stirred up fifty devils inside me. God! it was a terrible thing to do." He brushed the snow from her skirt. "You ain't hurt, are you?" anxiously.

"No," was the laconic reply.

"You see your power, you little handful of spunk. I would commit murder for you. Be mine, and I will act like a black nigger slave for you. But refuse me, and look out; it would be better that you were down there."

He pointed to the shattered sleigh.

"You were kind to me at first," he went on, "but your sister Rose leads you around by the nose. What she says is law to you. She made a remark at Mrs. Kelly's that you would never be my wife, for she would see to it."

Babbie tossed her head gracefully, stubbornly.

"No one shall rule me," she said. "I was half teasing when I refused you, Conrad. I have paid dear for my teasing," with a playful look.

He raised one slender hand to his lips.

That night there was a heavy snowfall. The white-robed winds were screaming like angry furies, and tearing one another.



Inside the Conway home, there was a storm no less fierce than that raging without.

"You don't know your own mind, Babbie Conway. You are too young for lovers. And where could you find a worse scoundrel than Conrad Miller?"

Night peeping in, like a white ghost, at the window, saw the two lovely sisters face each other; one tall, the other short; one light, the other dark; one a self-possessed Juno, the other a wilful, wild Diana.

"You are only two years older than I am, Rose Conway, and you talk as if you were my grandmother. You dictate to me, when you might as well whip the frozen fog outside."

Babbie put on a cloud.

"Pap, my words have no effect. This girl is going out to meet that worthless fellow, Conrad Miller," said Rose.

"Worthless!" retorted Babbie. "You might marry worse."

"Then God pity me."

Rose grew desperate. She swept to the door, to turn the key in the lock, but Babbie was there before her, and



had hurled the key under the stove.

"If you go out, you shall stay out," threatened Rose.

"Then stay out I will. Good night, good-bye."

Babbie, with her neck proudly arched, went forth into the night and storm. Sorrow seemed to be on the outside, and eagerly waiting to devour the wild girl, so roared the wind. Rose grew pale, as she turned to her father.

"Do you think, pap, she meant that?"

"Of course not. Don't worry yourself, Rose, daughter."

The stately girl went to the window and looked out.

What an awful night it was! The fierce wind was driving the snow against the panes, and whirling the heavy flakes in a mad dance about the stoop. The scene was an angry ocean of whiteness.

But Rose did not see the man standing near the gate, with the veil-like garments of the blast lashing his face. A girl was at his side, who looked like a beautiful fairy born of the frost.

"Babbie!"

He had taken her in his arms, and



was looking down into the upturned face on his breast.

Then off through the deep snow he plodded, half carrying her; by the tavern, with the brightly lighted windows, whence came the sounds of music and merriment; through the covered bridge, around which the wind shrieked, and under which flowed the restless, unfrozen sulphur creek; by the high, snow-mantled coal-banks; down the road, over the railroad ties.

The snowflakes chased one another madly. They rushed, in their wild flight, into the eyes, ears, and even the mouths of the man and the girl. But the couple, unheeding, trudged along till they reached the railway station.

Late that night, two sisters sat and watched, one wondrously fair; watched and waited and prayed, Rose and Hannah Conway. In the next room the father could be heard groaning and pacing up and down.

Outside, the wind wove seamless snow-drifts, and roared like an infuriated beast. It hurled itself against the old window-sashes, which struggled and shook be-



neath its savage attack. The stout old door felt its assault, but gave no other sign of the struggle than a pitiful squeak.

Inside, the lamp shed its bright piercing rays about the spotless kitchen. The fire crackled loudly in the old range, upon which the kettle sang a song of welcome home.

The dreary hours dragged on, till the windows were squares of pale, ghastly light at daybreak; but no black-eyed girl came. Morning came, noon came, but no Babbie came with them.

After their father had gone to his work at the mines, Rose Conway, with a cloud drawn about her head, made the best of her way through the deep snow to the railway station. The wind almost carried her off her feet, as she crossed, by a short cut, a huge culm bank. The slender plank that stretched over the sulphur creek was covered with ice, but Rose did not pause for a second. She attempted to cross, a gust of wind came roaring along, she clutched at the air, and fell into the water. Fortunately the torrent was not strong, and she escaped with wet shoes and skirts.

The station agent's eyes held pity as



well as admiration when he looked at her tired, white face. He answered the question she put to him, and caught her about the waist, for she staggered. He forced her to swallow some water, and then he saw her, with a step like an old woman's, go up the road, her skirts frozen in cakes.

"She has run away with that man, Hannah. They have gone to Philadelphia. They bought single tickets last night. O Babbie, Babbie," Rose was almost hysterical, "mam's own little baby that she died for!"

Rose wept the more, for that she wept in vain.

Hannah had more self-control. She pleaded with Rose to take off her frozen skirts, from which the kitchen fire was drawing streams of water, and forced a steaming cup of coffee on her.

"Oh, Hannah, my words drove her away. I am all to blame."

To and fro, to and fro, over the oil-cloth, trailed the unhappy girl, her skirts washing the floor.

"You to blame, Rose! Wasn't you trying to advise her for good and her own soul? Don't take on that way."



The supper that night, though a substantial meal, was a dreary one.

"I have now made up my mind to go to the city. I meant to go before Babbie ran away, but I was not certain; her action has decided mine. I have a bit of my school money left. It was lucky I saved that from the last term I taught. But I'll teach school no more. It is too much of a 'kiss-me' job. If you know nothing and have influence, you will get a school; if you are a genius and haven't some politician to back you, you may wait till you are gray for a situation. I shall work in the city. Perhaps I may find Babbie."

As Rose finished speaking, she glanced into her coffee cup, thus giving her sister time to wipe the tears shyly from her eyes.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

No one was very much surprised, when Babbie Conway eloped with Conrad Miller.

“Just like Babbie Conway,” commented old Mrs. Dormer, who knew her well. “She was always a flighty piece, that same Babbie, and always doing things she hadn’t ought to do, ever since a yard would make a petticoat for her; not a bit like her sister, Hannah or Rose. Her father ought to be glad to get rid of her.”

And so saying, Mrs. Dormer left the fence over which she and her neighbor, Mrs. Sharp, had been holding a bit of critical conversation.

But Babbie’s father was not so “glad to get rid of her.”

Evening was coming on. The wind was blowing a gale, and roaring in the chimney as only winter wind can roar. Now and then, the clap of a gate or stable door could be heard above the howling of the blast. The snow-clad mountains



were in sharp contrast to the black sky; they looked like white clouds drawn on a slate.

Hannah Conway, with a downcast countenance, was mending a worn drilling smock-frock belonging to her father—a garment in the winter of its existence. As industrious as Tabitha, she sewed on. She sat close to the window, with a lamp near her.

Her father was lacing up his stout shoes—a man upon whose head the snows of age had calmly fallen, and whose clean conscience and kind heart looked from his hazel eyes.

“Hannah,” he said, with a little stamp of his foot, after he had tied the second lace, “we might as well set in to supper.”

The girl quietly arose, laid her mending across the top of the old-fashioned sewing machine, and poured out coffee for her father and herself. Then she brought forth a pudding in her favorite china dish, on which blossomed, violent and flaring, immense scarlet flowers.

“I’m wondering, Hannah, where the little one is to-night. What a bitter cold night it is! Oh, if I thought that Babbie



was suffering from the wind and snow, I'd—but no, she is not, else she'd come back to me.

“Gone two months,” he continued, in a soliloquizing way, as he poured the steaming coffee into his saucer, “and only a few lines from her, to let me know that she is really married. I feel that she ain't happy. Maybe it would have been well for my poor, pretty little Babbie, had she died when her mother did.

“Hannah, Babbie's cradle and her mother's grave was prepared at the same time; a shroud and a christening dress was got ready. Ah, it was hard; the baby, not an hour of life behindst her; the mother, not an hour of life before. I dreamt about her last night, me poor little girl, who was christened in her mother's tears, before ever the holy baptism water touched her.”

The old man brushed a tear from his eye.

“Still it is a blessing Rose goes to see her, though she won't say nothing in her letters about how my little girl and her man get along together.”

“It will all be right yet, pap. I feel



that our Babbie will return to us. Conrad Miller won't make a kind husband for Babbie, and when he turns mean to her, she will come back to you and me. That's consolation."

"Oh, my poor foolish little girl! I never thought, when her and Rose quarreled that night, she would run off with such a man as Conrad Miller. Rose was for her good, Hannah, Rose was for her good. She didn't want her to marry the man—God forgive me for hating him!—'cause he's got such terrible bad habits.

"Why, Hannah dear, I saw him take his old mother by the hair of her head, and drag her round and round, just one month afore she died. I tell you, he felt the weight of my knuckles that day. And such a drunkard as he is! Oh, Babbie, Babbie!" the old man sighed. "I wish to God your mother had taken you with her."

Hannah tried to bring her feelings under control. With tact, she turned the subject.

"Take another piece of that steak, pap. You must eat it all. To-morrow's Friday, so you'll have no meat for a whole



day. Eat it; you need something to keep you strong and hearty."

With pleasant chat, she took up his attention during the remainder of the evening.

When the father and daughter knelt down to recite the rosary together, the old man's thoughts turned to his youngest child.

"Pray to God, Hannah, that she won't lose her faith, daughter. She was never overly pious, and now having such a man as Conrad Miller 'long with her, maybe she will throw aside what little piety she has."

After the father had gone to bed, and Hannah was alone in the tidy kitchen, she burst into tears.

"Oh Father in heaven," she sobbed, "be merciful to our little one! O mam, mam, if you'd only a lived! I know you're afore the throne of God; pray for the little one you gave up your own life for."

Hannah Conway was hardly four years older than her sister, yet she called her "the little one."

Sixteen years before, Mrs. Conway had



died in giving her third child birth. When the dimness of death had gathered over the mother's eyes, and she could no longer see the face of her babe, she laid the child in her husband's arms.

"You'll be good to her, I know, Peter, for her mam's sake. Hannah will grow up, and be a mother to my little darling. Call her Babbie after me, Peter, then you'll think oftener of the Babbie that's made your home what it is."

And Hannah indeed was always a mother to Babbie.

Perhaps Babbie did not really love Conrad Miller; but that her father and sister Rose objected to her noticing such a man, had been sufficient stimulus to the giddy girl to flirt with him. However, be it told that Conrad Miller was handsome and winning enough to turn the head of a wiser and older woman than Babbie Conway.

Now he and she had been gone from Farringdon for two months.

Peter Conway was trudging home through the snow. He had changed in those two months. Two months! Could eternity be longer? His hair had a few



more threads of gray in it, his face had more lines of care. Crunch! Crunch! his big nailed boots pounded down the snow.

A little cry, hardly louder than a snow-bird's. He turned to see a slender girl standing knee-deep in the freezing whiteness, with her hands held piteously out to him.

That face, those appealing eyes, those outstretched hands! Was this his dream of last night? The girl was out of breath; she had been running to catch up with him.

A second Peter Conway paused, only a second; for he saw that she was swaying and would fall. Then she was in his big arms, and crushed to his breast; her white face against his bearded dirty cheek; her small hands about his coal-dusty neck. A moment of heaven's own bliss for both.

He spoke first.

"Little one, you've come back to stay with ole dad."

"Forever and ever, never to leave him again!" was her murmured reply.

No reproaches from him; she had not expected them. She hung on his arm as they walked slowly home in happy silence.



Then she broke into speech:

"Pap, pap, I have been justly punished, but cruelly wronged; wronged by the man who was my husband; abused and beaten by the one who should have protected and loved me. In one of his drunken sprees, he left me for dead upon the floor. The running away was a novelty, and on that account attractive. A girl did that in a novel I read, and I wanted to be like her."

"But, little one, he did not beat you often—only once?"

"He beat me every time he got drunk, and that was every other day."

"Why didn't you leave him, and come to me at once?"

"Pride kept me away."

"But you have come."

"Yes, since death took him out of the world. I never loved him, though once I thought I did. I should have died, were it not for Sister Rose."

"Did you go to her?"

"Go to her! I was too proud for that. When I wouldn't come home to you, pap, you might know I wouldn't go to Rose, gentle and loving as she is, dear girl. No,



we met by accident — at least, she said it was by accident — but I think she had been hunting for me. She saw how careworn I was, and she came to my wretched house in a back street.

“O, daddy dear, God made the country, and man made the town. You ought to have seen the wretched house in a back street we lived in. Our little home up here is a palace, for we get the sun.

“Rose petted me so that I broke down, and told her all. I made her solemnly promise that she wouldn’t say a word to you about my misery. She brought us clothes and victuals, and tried, the dear saint, to make a Christian of my husband. I thought her heart would break, she cried so, the night he died. His death frightened even me, bad as I am, for he died like a dog. It was his drink that killed him. Drunk, he cut his hand with window glass, while trying to strike me; blood-poisoning corrupted his whole system! God forgive me, I could hardly pity him.”

“Babbie!”

“You know, pap dear, I am not like



Rose or Hannah. A spitfire, bitter, spiteful, hating more strongly than loving, and—”

“You’re too hard on yourself, child; you ain’t like that.”

“My shoulders were black and blue the night Conrad died, pap; that may excuse my bitterness.”

“And you so little, so much of a baby, Babbie. I’m sure the angels must a kept that news from your mam, else heaven wouldn’t be heaven for her. But why didn’t you write, and I’d have brought you home, though it cost me my last cent.”

“I did write, wrote three letters, and tried to write a dozen more, but every one of them I destroyed. Why should my misery become your misery? Doubt were better for you than that; and I just couldn’t write lies to you.”

“Off goes those black duds of yours to-night, and with them goes the memory of Conrad Miller. The past is past, Babbie, and what’s done can’t be undone, but it kin be forgot. You’re my own little girl again, and that wedding ring you kin wear for others, but you’re just plain Babbie Conway to me.”



Mrs. Sharp ran over to Mrs. Dormer's. Mrs. Sharp wore a hermaphrodite costume—her husband's coat over her wrapper, under which conspicuous were her husband's shoes.

"Kin you believe it!" she burst out. "I thought I'd split afore I got over to tell you. Babbie Conway's just gone up the road, hanging on her pap's arm, the bold young divil. I got a glimpse of them as they went by. I guess she knows be this time that she flew off with a wolf, and she's glad to have her old faithful father to luk after her. Conrad Miller ain't with her, but she has a wedding ring on. I took notice to that, you kin bet. But maybe she bought the ring, and put it on herself. There's no telling."

"That there ain't," said Mrs. Dormer, turning the steak in the frying pan, and rubbing the end of her nose. "She's a stray duck, that damsel. How in the name of common sense, did she ever get into the Conway family; all of them fine men and women, and her a limb of Satan. Hannah's a model girl, and so is Rose, and the old man would miss his



Sunday dinner afore he would miss his Mass. But there is a bad egg in every dozen, I guess."

"I know what's wrong," returned Mrs. Sharp, sniffing, for the steak smelt good. "She was born under an unlucky star. Sure, wasn't old Mrs. Kelly in the room when she came into the world—sorry day for poor Mrs. Conway, God rest her!—and she looked out at the stars. 'O God, deliver us from evil,' says she, howling. 'If that child's a boy, he will hang for murder, and if it's a girl, you will curse the day she was born.' 'Shut your prating tongue,' says the doctors, furious mad. 'You're out of your senses, woman. Sich talk would do among pagans, but can't be tolerated among people that call themselves Christians.'

"And wasn't Mrs. Kelly right? Was there ever a bigger divil than Babbie, little as she is? I wonder her folks have a thing to do with her. But I guess they know her better than we do," she added, softening, "and maybe there is good in her. Every one should luk at home, for it is easy to see the mope in



our neighbor's eye, when we can't see the bean in our own."

Mrs. Dormer turned her face towards Mrs. Sharp, a face like a dough cake, the only expression being around the mouth. To judge from her figure, Mrs. Dormer had dined largely off suet pudding, and most of it had entered into her make-up.

"What a good woman you are at heart, Mrs. Sharp!" said she, in a squeaky voice. "Always giving the divil his due, and never columbiating. Sure, how do we know but Conrad Miller hyptonized the poor child."

Mrs. Sharp tapped her foot on the floor with pleasure at the compliment, and thus brought that member into more conspicuous notice. If her heart were as big and broad as her foot, then indeed should she be an angel of charity.

But Babbie was at her father's gate. A face appeared first at the window, then at the door—a homely face resembling Peter Conway's very closely. Then Babbie was lying on the bosom of her sister, the only mother's bosom she had ever known.



“Welcome back, welcome back a thousand times!” said a loving girl’s voice.  
“It ain’t no home when you ain’t here.”



## CHAPTER III.

### HER SISTER'S BETROTHED.

"Hannah, there, don't waste time peeling the potatoes. Throw them into the pot with their jackets on; a physician told me the best part of the potato is nearest the skin. I will strip off their duds when they are boiled, and then they may appear in the altogether, or in the nude, for supper. Meanwhile, you and I can run upstairs, and I will do your hair."

Hannah, very much flurried, tossed the tubers into the water, clapped the pot on the stove, pushed the steaming coffee to the back of the range, and then made a dive for the staircase leading to her bedroom.

In advance of her was Babbie, a vision of girlish beauty, in a pink dress with lace and ribbons, her dark hair unbraided and loosely fastened with a pink ribbon at the back of her head.

Babbie plumped Hannah down into a rocker, and with swift, deft fingers took



little wads of paper out of her hair.

Scraps of poetry, news items, bits of fiction were on the papers, which made no mean pile on the bureau. What cared Hannah for the weary heads which had been broken over those syndicate verses, of the jaded novelist's fingers which had clicked off that "best seller" by the light of the midnight oil?

With delighted eyes, she was watching the mirror, where Babbie's little fingers were gathering up and bunching crinkled hair into waves along the temples, and a mound upon the poll.

"Babbie, ain't you got the knack of doing things!" squeaked the happy girl, as her sister pushed a glass beaded comb into the back locks. "Glory be, I look five years younger. Won't Ned be tickled to see me so!"

Babbie was hustling Hannah into a tight-fitting calico dress, and looked, for all the world, like a gay little humming bird decking up a sober-featured sparrow.

"Crack, there goes a button, Hannah! Don't you dare to breathe till I have this waist hooked! There you are. Now a pin. Stand over by the glass, and see



if you can find room for improvement. No? Well, now a kiss. That's it.

"If Ned Higgins is not bewitched by you to-night, I shall consider him an owl that can't bear the sunlight. You can sit up here if you like, and fall in love with that maid in the mirror, but I must run downstairs to set the table. Man is a carnivorous animal, and likes his meat done to a turn. A woman hasn't much difficulty in getting to a man's heart when his stomach is full; it gives her a kind of boost or stepping-stone. Now to feed the beast."

She skipped down the rickety stairs to the kitchen, followed by the laughing Hannah.

"Babbie, you are wittier than an actor."

Soon the table was covered with a snowy cloth, darned and patched carefully. Cups and saucers merrily clicked; knives and forks and spoons jingled.

Babbie took two mince pies out of the oven, lifted a knuckle of meat from the stove, and poured into a dish a heap of potatoes, their brown skins bursting. She swiftly had the tubers peeled, and



lying in a pyramid, their faces and many pits making them look like blind Arguses—all eyes and no sight.

Hannah went to the window and gazed out at the white landscape; at the trees, which had cast away their leafy garb, and adorned their branches with gleaming ice-gems; at the black old bake oven, which had laid a snowy veil upon its head. The lazy wind was wallowing amid the clinging flossy snow. A great white silence held the town. All the noises of the breaker and roads had been sheeted and blanketed and put to bed.

She turned suddenly.

“Here he is,” she exclaimed.

Babbie made a wild dash for the stairs, bumping the table, and making the cups and spoons dance.

“You meet him first, Hannah. Like the hero in a good old blood-and-thunder melodrama, I’ll pop up at the right moment.”

Then she had flown to the room above.

Hannah flung open the door, and from the snow-swept porch, a big ruddy-cheeked, blue-eyed man put his hand into her warm palms. She helped him



off with his worn overcoat, and then set a chair for him comfortably before the fire. He rubbed his hands in the glow, and turned his candid eyes admiringly on her face.

"Well, how is the girl to-night? She certainly looks good enough to eat. I don't know what it is—maybe it's the hair fixing—but you are stunning."

Hannah laughed gleefully, and told him he was like every other man—a flatterer, and was complimenting because his supper was ready and steaming.

"You said I looked good enough to eat, as if I was a well boiled cabbage. Dominick Kennelly told his wife before he married her that he liked her well enough to gobble her up, and when she cast that up to him the other day, he said he wished to the Lord he had eat her, for then he would have peace."

"That's it, Hannah. I like a girl with life in her. A joke before a meal is better than music at a banquet. You ain't blue and low-spirited now."

"No; no more melancholies for me, Ned."

She laid her hands on his shoulders,



and looked down into his upturned face.

"O, Ned, I have such news. Babbie, my little sister, has come home to daddy and me. She is a widow. Oh, I know you will like her."

He turned his eyes from hers, and gazed into the fire, where blue and yellow flames waltzed over the burning anthracite.

"I heard she was home," he said slowly. "Just got a whisper of it to-day."

Hannah was slightly disappointed; he should have taken more kindly to Babbie.

"But," he added, looking about in relief, "she ain't here to-night?"

"Yes, she is. See, there are put on four places at the table—you and me, Babbie and daddy."

"Hannah," his face was almost sullen, "don't you go and git mad and offended at me, but I know I won't like your sister. I ain't never saw her, but I never could care for a bold woman, and—"

"She ain't a bold woman, Ned Higgins."

"I don't mean it in that way, Hannah,



for I don't want to hurt your feelings, not for this whole town. But that woman made you and your old daddy suffer, and I know that, for I seen the misery in your face. That's why I don't like her."

"She is so young, Ned, only sixteen, and she has suffered so much—so much."

Hannah's voice died off in a squeak; she was quite ready to cry.

"She deserved to suffer," he retorted.

"Oh, not the way she suffered. He used to beat her."

"Well, when a bold, giddy—"

"Ned!"

"Forgive me again, Hannah; that slipped out. I meant to say that when a sheep runs off with a bear, she is going to get her wool pulled, and lose some of it; maybe a good deal, most all of it, till she is clean plucked bare."

He saw that he had hurt Hannah very keenly, and he tried to make amends. This woman was to be his future wife, and he could not permit himself to be unkind, though he must obey his conscience, and be just and truthful.

"Do you think, Hannah, that Bab—"



I mean your sister—would mind me being here for supper?"

"Yes, she would mind you; she would be glad to have you. She knows you are here, and in her heart she welcomes you. And I tell you, you are going to like her."

He grew stubborn.

"But I tell you that I am not going to like her. I won't, I won't, I won't let myself like her, though you may be certain I won't hurt her feelings for your sake."

"And why won't you like her?"

He jumped from his seat, and went very close to her. He caught her hands and held them to his mighty chest, while his kind, handsome eyes looked tenderly into hers.

"Why, because—because she made the dearest, best little girl in the world set up nights on nights, and cry her eyes out. Hannah, I ain't been coming here without you knowing what a lot I think of you, and if any one hurts you, they hurt me, too. To see you suffer, and to know the one that makes you suffer, is to turn me again that one."

Hannah hardly knew whether to be



pleased or not at his attitude; but she was happy to hear again that he loved her—her a woman with so little attraction, he a man so good and upright and of such sterling character. A little rose came into each of her cheeks. Where is the woman that does not relish a compliment from the lips of the man she loves? Gently, without a word, but with a grateful smile, she drew her hands from his, and poured out the fragrant coffee, for she heard footsteps descending the staircase, whose door was open.

Enter Peter Conway in Sunday make up and costume; a suit of black clothes, shiny with age; a collar that simply tortured his chin, a sort of voluntary penance, like an anchorite's hair shirt; cuffs down to his knuckles, cuffs being ornaments he wore but seldom; and shoes shined to a painful brilliancy. His honest face was glowing and red, as if from a too close shave.

"Hello, Ned!" He smiled his genial broad smile. "I heard your voice. I am dressed for the occasion, you see."

He wrung the young man's hand.

"This is all in honor of our supper and



your meeting with Babbie. She will be down in a minute. I left her standing at the head of the stairs, and I never saw her eyes look so big and frightened; they were like moons. But I will call her."

"I think she must have heard us talking," whispered Hannah. "I ought to have closed the stair door; upstairs you kin hear a whisper in the kitchen."

Higgins felt a qualm, such as he would have felt, had he trodden heedlessly upon a wounded butterfly or a dying little bird.

In answer to Mr. Conway's summons, there was a patter of swift little feet on the staircase, as if the owner were a criminal coming to receive her sentence, and running to keep up her courage. In swallow fashion, she skimmed into the kitchen.

Higgins caught his breath with admiration.

The slight, graceful form in pink had come upon his vision like a ray of pure light into a dusky room, or like the morning spreading upon a gloomy mountain.



In a second, he was looking into the lustrous night of a pair of dark eyes which would have melted a Blue Beard; at a small, well shaped head, encircled with a crown of many shadowed hair; at a face with cheeks like roses in the snow—a face which from that moment he never forgot. He had called her a woman; she was but a bud opening into womanhood, but the rosy dawn of a woman.

“Babbie, this is Hannah’s intended husband, Ned Higgins,” Higgins heard the father say.

Like a candid, fearless boy, the lovely creature put her hand into his, and he felt his strong fingers close tenderly and delicately on the dainty mite of warm helplessness.

“I am glad to know you,” she said, simply, yet graciously, “and I congratulate you on having won our Hannah. Oh, Mr. Higgins, she is such a woman.”

Her self-possession confused him; and just then he felt like the man in the dark room looking for the black hat which was not there.

“Yes—yes—s—Miss—I—I,” he stut-tered.



Then she laughed, just a bird's note or two down deep in her little throat.

"Never mind," she said; "it is all right. Tell that to Hannah. By the way, upstairs I heard every word you said."

Her voice had just a suggestion of seriousness. He started, and another wave of confusion swept toward him, but her amiable smile was reassuring.

"You know," she continued, "in this old house, with its unplastered ceilings, sound travels so, and the stair door was open. I played eavesdropper in listening, and eavesdroppers never hear pleasant things about themselves. But," there was now song-like pleading in her voice, "I want you and me to be good friends. I ask you to stay for supper now and try to care for me a wee bit; try to make yourself believe you care. You know I never had a brother, and Hannah is going to give me a big grown-up brother at last. Won't you be my brother for Hannah's sake?"

A hand, a typical miner's hand, spread and broadened and hardened from toil, with blue scars on the knuckles and fingers, and nails broken and rough—



spontaneously such a hand flew out and grasped with genuine heartiness Babbie's little fingers.

"Consider me your brother from now on, not only for Hannah's sake, but for your own."

Then he got confused again.

And simple Hannah was supremely happy.



## CHAPTER IV.

### WHERE'ER I CAME, I BROUGHT CALAMITY.

Asa Robinson's motives for coming to Farrington were various. He meant to spend a vacation, write up for his editor anything of interest, have as much fun as possible, and make love to mine beauties.

So far things had gone very smoothly for him. He had dropped but yesterday into old Mrs. Kelly's store, and now carried in his pocket the pencil draft of a sketch about her visit to Pittsburgh and New York. He laughed as he read and re-read her words:

"Sure, you couldn't see yourself afront of you. As soon as I got to me daughter's, says I, 'For heaven's sake, Nora, give us a basin till I wash. And say no word to me about Pittsburgh.'

"No, no, I won't forget me trip to New York neither. Me husband died just two years and a month afore Kitty and her man went there to live. I set out to see her.



She was living across from the Metropolitan Opera House, in rooms. Sure, I never thought that people could live as high up as she did!

"That evening wasn't I setting be the winda looking down into the street, and says I to Kitty: 'What if a fire should break out, Kitty, what would become of us?' Kitty says something about 'no danger of that,' and went into another room. Just then a blaze of light lit up the street. Sure, I was on me feet in an instant. Throwing up a winda, I screeched 'Fire!' to the top of me lungs. I felt that me life wasn't worth a pinch of snuff to me then, for I never could jump to the street below.

"In comes Kitty like a streak, and pulls me from the winda. Mother, for heaven's sake, come from the winda. It's not a fire; it's the lights on the top of the Opera House just lit up.' And sure, that's all it was. Of course, I laughed meself, but wat a fright they had give me!

"That wasn't the finish of me frights, for next day Kitty took me to Coney Island, and then to a monkey garden



called 'The Chew,' whatever that means. We went to a neat little depot, and went into it. As we sat there a short while, looking at the people coming in, me curiosity got the better of me, and leaning over, says I to Kitty, soft-like: 'Where's the rails for the trains to come on?' I was used to ride on trains here in Farringdon, you know. Afore Kitty could answer, an awful thing occurred—away went the depot with me!

"'O glory be to God!' I screeched, jumping to me feet. 'What has happened to the depot?' I felt sure that the river was busted, and I was done for; that the city was being swept away wid one of them floods I'd read about.

"'Hush, mother,' says Kitty, 'you're not in a depot; it's a ferryboat you're on.' "

Robinson, as he read the article, was sitting under a tree not a rod away from the railroad. Beyond the tracks rushed a huge stream of water, that had been much swollen by the recent heavy rains. A long narrow plank swung across the torrent.

Chancing to raise his eyes, he saw a



girl of exquisite beauty placing one dainty foot on this makeshift bridge. For a second he stared at the graceful little figure, then jumped to his feet and cried out:

“Don’t risk that board; I tried to cross it, and failed. You will go down into the stream!”

The girl laughed saucily, and took a long daring step upon the plank. Another, then she paused in the center, and tossed back a strand of loose hair. The newspaper man was bewitched and frightened. But she reached the railroad in safety.

“As light and sure-footed as a fairy of the Alps, so light her tread that, Camilla-like, she might run over that creek’s surface without sinking, or skim over that grass merely dimpling it, but not bending its blades,” he muttered to himself, as she came nearer to him.

“And the beauty! I’ll wager she is a somebody up here to spend the summer, and go back to Nature. Wonderful black eyes, bright as a wave-washed onyx; hair dark and glossy; an oval, pink-tinted face. That hair loose about her neck



and shoulders, if so charming in disorder, what must it be when arranged! Such a mouth as hers one is not satisfied with merely seeing. An inviting eye, and yet methinks right modest."

The girl was too close for him to have time for further thought. She laughed like a merry boy.

"Your fears were groundless," she said, "though the creek is misbehaving sadly. Usually it is a quiet snake which creeps away silently, but to-day it has become a roaring bull, and runs madly amuck."

Her manner told him she was of the coal country; so much freedom and familiarity without boldness.

"But it was kind of you to warn me," she added.

"I am a stranger here," he said, with the hope of more conversation.

"I have heard of you," she replied, "and have seen you often, though you may not have noticed me. But I am one of the many girls of Farringdon, while you are the only newspaper writer from Philadelphia. There is a halo of romance about you. You see Farringdon is a village, and in a village everybody knows



everybody else's business. A stranger, as you are, is discovered as soon as he puts his foot within Farringdon. Old Mrs. Kelly, who is somewhat of a cynic, once said that 'if you wanted to find out the poperlation of this here town, come into the place on a train; one-half of the residents would be at the depot to see you getting off the car, and the other half would be hanging out the winders.'"

He wondered how he could have missed seeing such a face as hers. He found new beauty in her even as she talked and smiled.

Those strong little teeth of hers, not a spot on them; not a line in her face; hardly a freckle. No make-up about this lovely little vision. She was even en deshabille; her hair carelessly caught at the nape of her neck; her wrapper slightly soiled from housework, and a tiny neat patch showing on the skirt. She had doubtless taken this short cut, and to escape observation, come through the huge rock and slate banks, which, like haughty Ethiop beauties, towered in majestic splendor, ablaze in the sun with bits of sulphur stone and pieces of coal.



"Mrs. Kelly, your store-keeper, and I are friends," he said, "and she has spoken to me about most of Farringdon's girls. Surely she must have mentioned you."

He studied her peach-bloom complexion, there in the glare of the sun, which would have routed a la belle Otero, and sent Liane de Pougy scurrying to her gas-lighted salon.

"I am certain that she did, and made no complimentary mention of me. She likes my sisters, but I am not so fortunate as to have her esteem. I played a joke on her one time, and she has never forgiven me. She likes to joke at the expense of others, but woe betide the one who has a joke at her expense."

"May I ask what the joke was?"

He was eager to have the conversation continued.

"Oh, it wasn't very much. Mrs. Kelly had an old gray horse that was a real thorn in the side to her. He was always and ever running away. She declared her eyes were crooked with watching him. Early one morning I chanced into her store and found one of my friends there.



“‘My,’ said I wickedly to my friend, ‘I got a fright as I came down. A gray horse raced like mad up the road, and took to the bush.’

“Mrs. Kelly hears everything, either directly or indirectly, and I knew she was eavesdropping, as my friend and I chatted.

“‘Where is the horse? Out there yet?’ and Mrs. Kelly made a dash from behind the counter, knocked down a can of corn upon her foot, and sped out into the road.

“‘This is the first of April,’ said I; ‘April’ fool, Mrs. Kelly,’ and I ran, while she roared after me calling me a dirty deceiver.’ She has never liked me since.”

A tall, broad-shouldered young chap, with light hair, had come up the railroad. The girl’s back was turned to him. Robinson saw the fellow’s blue eyes blaze with jealousy, and noticed his lips drawn tightly together. The reporter at once dropped the lover-like air he had assumed, as the maiden talked on. He wanted no tussle with that brawny miner.

“Hasn’t Mrs. Kelly said any thing about Babbie Conway?” asked the girl.



Babbie Conway! The newspaper man opened his eyes. Mrs. Kelly had given him a volume of this girl's escapades. The Babbie Conway he had fancied was a bold-faced vixen, with bold black eyes which sought for admiration; bold red lips, bold black eyebrows—an ugly, bad mannered duckling, nothing like this lovely swan. So much for Mrs. Kelly's description. Why, this little dimpled thing before him was only a child, not more than sixteen years old, if even that. There was in her face the innocence of the child, blended with the sauciness of the mad-cap.

This was the girl who ran away, and married a rakish, good-for-nothing fellow, and dogged him into his grave. This the brazen hussy who scandalized everybody by riding pellmell through the village on the back of a mule.

This the girl who, on a hot day, with another daring girl like herself, walked into a swimming dam, clothes and all, and came out "like a drowned rat."

This the girl who drubbed her sister Hannah, and had her "so cowed that Hannah was afraid to say boo." This



the girl who used to play marbles like a boy, and who used to cheat shamefully in the game.

This the bold-face who, finding a huge black snake coiled about a bird's nest, fled not nor shrieked, but seized a long switch and beat the reptile to death.

A ringing laugh from Babbie. He thought he had never heard such a laugh. It rippled from her throat like the song of a nightingale, and there was such a ring of genuine merriment in it.

"Are you afraid of me?" she quizzed. "Mrs. Kelly told you what I am."

"The old villain is a—I mean she lied." he returned.

"Doubtless, she told some truth," said Babbie.

The jealous-eyed man had now come close, and stood pounding down with his heels the yellow-circled dandelions. A bee was luxuriating in a wild flower's breezy tent, "his conquered Sybaris," when the big man's broad foot sent him buzzing to the poppies which grow by the River Lethe.

As the girl turned, and flashed him a bright look, his face softened as if a



mellow light had been shed upon it. She bowed to Robinson, and walked away with the big fellow, after saluting him with a pleasant "Hello, Ned!" while Robinson cursed inwardly.

"Whoever he is, and, Jingo, he is well made, he's deep in love with that chic little bit of an angel," mused the reporter.

"Strange, strange, passing strange. Tiny Cupid is riding that lion. Venus, how great is thy power! That slim little girl could swing that big chap around her finger, grant though he is a terror of the woods. Strange, strange. Samson, I'll avow, was no bigger than that fellow, but then Delilah was no handsomer than that lassie. Why, that bear of a miner could span that girl's waist with his hand, yet she is more powerful than he. The weak confounds the strong. La Pucelle d'Orleans puts to flight the mailed soldier.

"Yet who can blame him? She has a wicked little twinkle in her eye that shows she is of the earth earthy. I wonder what dad would say if I walked into him with that hardy, beautiful mountain laurel under my arm! He would go mad about her, for dad has lots of the boy in him yet.



“And,” he said aloud, “that is the girl whom, according to Mrs. Kelly, the village calls ill-starred.”



## CHAPTER V.

### A STRIKER'S DAYDREAM.

Solitude sat spreading its dusky wings over Farringdon. The long-dreaded, much-feared strike was on.

Silence. Silent the once busy breakers, that stood huge giants against the summer sky. The windows, like so many wondering eyes, reflected the sunlight, and stared vacantly out of the town. Silent and dead the once shrill voices of the boiler houses; silent and still the blacksmith shops; silent and motionless the long lines of worn, dirty mine cars; silent and still the old fan that mused on its once active life. The very sulphur creek seemed to hush its voice as it glided and gurgled along, and mourned in the deepest black. Silence on everything.

The miners were carrying from the underground dungeons their tools—no easy matter, for the tools were of the hardest, heaviest metal.

An old white-haired miner was climbing over a coal bank to reach his



home. He bore on his right shoulder drills, a boring machine, a weighty hammer, and a mining needle. As he climbed the steep bank, he seemed like Sisyphus; only, the miner carried his burden, and did not roll it up the incline.

A young Apollo had flung down his saw, hatchet, hammer, and gimlet on the dusty wooden bridge, and was leaning over the railing, looking to the west.

His bold, bright eyes saw a railroad winding for a monotonous mile along a filthy creek and along banks of cinders, ashes, and culm. In the distance, green woods outlined; with far away, a village built like a nest on the mountain side. But his mind was not on those things.

He took off his oily, tight-fitting cap, pulled the leaky, greasy mine-lamp from it, and tossed the little teapot-like torch down into the creek, which swallowed it at a gulp.

That lamp had been his friend for years. Often in the black diamond catacombs, he had blessed its rushlight flame—a flame more welcome than the mild rays of the moon, or the bright



beams of the sun. But the little lamp's days of service were over, and like all worn-out things, it had to go. It would never see the interior of a mine again, nor would the feeble old man tottering up the bank. Both had had their day.

The broad-chested, strong-necked young giant on the bridge, however, was not reflecting on decay and death. Those thoughts are for the old and the care-laden.

His countenance was flooded with a brightness which not even the morning sun could cause—a brightness which his yellow locks served to heighten, but a brightness his face would have worn, though he were still in the bowels of the mine, where darkness made its home.

He had before his mind's eye a slim fairy of a girl, whose childhood still lingered on her brow; whose mischievous black eyes sparkled out through a veil of raven tresses, like stars shining through a cloud; whose mouth was small and pleading and quivering, as if already she had tasted sorrow.

A salad bird flew by him, and as he



followed it with his eyes, the girl seemed to be embodied in that tiny feathered form, like the princess of a fairy tale; she was something he could love and reverence and desire, but could never have. Could never have! who should say that?

“Heigh, Higgins, quit your mooning!” said a teasing voice, and a friendly miner laid down his tools by those of the Apollo. “That’s the way with youse kids in love—always seeing her face in the skies, or in the weather, if it doesn’t happen to be stormy. Don’t you think you had better git home and washed; call off this dreaming, and see the girl herself? Hannah Conway ain’t a girl what wants to be fixed up and painted and dinkied out for her beau. You are welcome any time with her.”

Ned Higgins choked down a sigh. He clapped his cap on his streaming yellow locks, opened his shirt at the throat and chest, to let the air play on his breast, smiled his good-natured smile, and tried to enjoy his chum’s conversation.



But he had rather have been alone just then. And he had not been thinking of Hannah Conway.

The miner had cruelly destroyed for Higgins a glimpse of heaven, as a breeze breaks up the visionary clouds and sky in the motionless water.



## CHAPTER VI.

### MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN.

There were sad hearts at Farringdon, and eyes red with weeping. Today the men were receiving their last pay. Only God knew when they would receive another.

It was a dreary outlook; a long, dry, weary desert of suffering, and at the end the gaunt wolf of hunger standing with his lean jaws open.

On the mountain side stood an old woman, with wild gray hair, sunken eyes, ringed with red, leaden lips, and thin face, covered with dust-colored skin, drawn so tight as to show her cheek bones—a horror of eyes and skin and bone.

She had a scanty bunch of herbs in her talon-like fingers, and perched on a huge stone, she was looking down into the valley.

She seemed famine personified, gloating over the coal mine town—a fearful harpy that had snatched from unhappy Lazarus and his babes their last morsel—a



harpy sent by Dives to collect his tithes, and bring the revenues to his sumptuous palaces, that he might entertain his blase guests for an hour.

Near this Hecate on the mountain side, a goat was staring through grotesque bushes down at the miners' home—a very satyr.

Many of the men were about to set out for distant parts that night or on the morrow. The cheapest mode of conveyance was to be used—the freights and coal trains.

More than one mother's heart was throbbing with pain as the thought of the many dangers presented itself.

More than one lone woman sat sobbing and moaning before the old family album, as she looked at a boyish countenance in its pages.

Many a delicate girl face was worn with weeping, as she sat alone, so much alone, in her bedroom.

Most of the men who were to leave Farringdon, and go to seek their fortune in distant cities, were tingling with the anticipation of new scenes, with the hope, too, of money to be wrested by hard labor from the miserly rich.



Many of those healthy, handsome faces came back later, drawn, tired and thin. Some of those faces were never seen again. Others came home to Farringdon wearing the cold mask of death.

Exposure, hunger, disease, midnight rides on box-cars in the chilly air, with the dews falling thick and fast—all these ate into the stout, manly hearts of the miners, gone out into the unknown world, and poisoned in those hearts the rich red stream of life.

There was little drinking done at the taverns that pay-day. From one small saloon floated upon the summer air the wild, rough eloquence of Dominick Kennelly, a burly fellow, as he encouraged with a fiery harangue the tepid hearts of some of his fellow strikers.

Meg Kennelly, Dominick's wife, was sitting in the little cemetery by a silent grave, the sweet air blowing unheeded upon her colorless face. At times a paroxysm of grief would throw her upon the little mound, and she would bury her hard, strong fingers in the dirt. Her only child was lying there.

Some of the men, those were fathers,



had a desperate look in their eyes; others, those were boys, had the light of daring and adventure in theirs. Some eyes, those were women's, had dull despair in them; some, those were girls', hate and bitterness.



## CHAPTER VII.

### GREEK MEETS GREEK.

Mrs. Dormer and Mrs. Sharp were at the fence again, holding critical conversation.

"The men is liable to do anything," said Mrs. Dormer vaguely. "There's a carload of them rotten scabs come to-night, to run the washery, but they better look after their skins. They don't know, cows that they are, that we know they're coming."

"I hope that our men won't kill them; only give 'em a blamed good thrashing. Ugh, anything but murder. Do you know, it looks blue for that newspaper fella that is staying at Betty Downing's hotel. Robinson is his name; the low cub, I can't remember his first name, for it's something outlandish. He wrote things about the miners that they didn't like, and he drawed some cartoons of the miners that weren't true. And the face of him to stay right here among us! But his goose is cooked, I'm afeard.



"Besides, he has got Mrs. Kelly on his back. He put a couple of pieces in the paper about her, and you know she can't bear to have her name in print, let alone have fun poked at her. She gives him a plucking every time any one goes into her store and she will be getting that buck into trouble, take me word for it. You can't blame her. Wait till I give you a bit of what the city paper has to-day."

And Mrs. Sharp read:

"Mrs. Kelly continued her narrative. It is a delight to hear her talk. 'I attended the funeral of poor Maria Ford this morning. When the dear soul was laying in her coffin, looking for all the world like a saint—though she ain't none—in sails that loose-tongued old Nancy Cook, who is dumber nor a mule. She gaped at a fine wreath of wax flowers wid I. H. S. on them.

" ' "Ho," says she, "does that mean Maria was Irish?"

" ' "No," says I, me blood rising to think of sich ignerance; "it means I HAVE SUFFERED."

" ' "Yes, and suffer she did, poor woman," says Nancy.



“ ‘I saw a couple of girls getting ready to titter, but I give them a look that would freeze coal oil, and I tell you, they kept their faces straight. What do you think the old clown says to me by the way of compliment! She turns, and says she:

“ ‘ “You would make a fine corpse, Misses.” ’ ”

“Now for that piece and some others he is going to get handled with hands that won't be any too gentle,” said Mrs. Sharp.

“I ain't got much pity for the like of him,” returned Mrs. Dormer. “A black eye wouldn't hurt him much. Instead of offering our necks to get walked on, we'll offer him rotten tomatoes.”

“Yes, a black eye he needs, for he's got his eye on Babbie Conway.”

“Don't say!”

Up went Mrs Dormer's hands and eyes at the same moment.

“But give the poor little divil her due; she turned him down flat when he spoke to her,” pursued Mrs. Sharp. “And it wasn't grief for her dead husband made her do it. No, she is heart and soul with the



miners; she would die for them; and even if she did like this newspaper chap, she wouldn't have him for what he is."

"More credit to her spunk! I'll never rake her out again. But is the newspaper fella after her yet?"

"After her! Well, I guess he is. He's always poking around to get a peep at her, like a jackdaw, hooping about to pick up any word she drops. He says she is above her spear, so handsome a girl. Sure, he forced himself on her, and she up and fetched him a merry good crack on the face. Hannah's beau, that Ned Higgins, told me old man that Babbie's a brick."

"So Hannah has a beau!"

"Yes indeed, and a nice fella from Overbeck. She is a good girl, and lucky the man that gets her. She could be prettier, though. Pity she isn't like Babbie or Rose in looks, but Hannah is the dead spit of her father. No prettier than a mushroom, but the man that marries Hannah will never get teacups bounced off his head, the way they say Babbie did to Miller. No, indeed, Hannah won't never be shot for beauty."

"Handsome is as handsome does, Mrs.



Sharp. But, oh, dear, this strike has me demoralized."

"There," said Mrs. Sharp, turning round, "down there sets me three young ones swalleying green cherries like ducks."

"Divil the hurt will the cherries do them. Last summer I bought a half a bushel of green apples, and hid them in the cellar. When I went to look for them, me young ones had gobbled up every apple. Colic or cholery marbles, not a bit of them."

"Oh, them three youngsters of mine have brass-lined bellies. I ain't afraid of them three getting sick. But I want to send them on an errant. Come up here, the half of you!" she concluded, calling out in a shrill voice.

Then to her boy:

"Skip over to Mrs. Kelly's store, and get two cans of sourdines."

"Ain't it a pity," said Mrs. Dormer, "that a girl with a head full of brains, like Rose Conway, has to live in the city, and wait on tables? She has lots of push to study, and ought to be up here teaching school. One of the directors said she was a very parrot of learning."



"Did he say parrot? Was that the word? I heard it was peragon or paragram or something big like that. She certainly does know geog'aphy, arithmetic, hist'ry, and them things," replied Mrs. Sharp, damming with faint praise. "But she ought to know them, and no credit to her, for ain't she always been at school?"

"Now I hear she is studying Latin and French between meals, when she don't have to wait. Such trash, even for a school teacher to stuff her head with! When will she get to France to talk with the French, or to—to—wherever the Latins live to gabble with them. Latin is all right for priests, but fer women—did you ever hear the like?"

Mrs. Sharp resented any reference to Rose Conway's abilities, for Mrs. Sharp's niece had been pushed by politics into Rose Conway's school, and the niece, as every one knew, was not a paragon of learning.

"Well," answered Mrs. Dormer, slyly, "edication never turned Rose Conway's head, though the getting of a school has turned other people's. I know one teacher who's got the notion into her empty



head that she's a somebody, but how she is mistaken herself, poor thing! Lands alive, the way she togs herself out since she got that school, and the strut of her when she walks! I never see her but I think of a barrel on wheels. This same stuck-up piece never goes out no more without a veil on, as if the wind could hurt such a face as hers."

The pointed allusion to her niece, strong in its truth, nettled Mrs. Sharp, but she swallowed her anger, and was silent.

"Poor Mrs. Kelly is sick," pursued Mrs. Dormer, changing the subject. "Bad nerves. It's the blackness of this town be night that gave her the spell."

"Sure, you don't mean the darkness affected her, Mrs. Dormer."

"Not exactly, though the dark nights are enough to give one the blues—nary a light in the town. No, Mrs. Kelly went out at night looking for that beast of a horse she has; he had got away again; and what should she do, the poor ole soul, but not see a cow in the dark sleeping in the road, and she fell flop over the cow's back. She made a grab



and cotch the beast be the horns. Sure 'tis the devil,' says she, and fainted away. Her nerves ain't been good since."

"The divil mend her," blazed out Mrs. Sharp. "No wonder she is always thinking of the divil when she cheats so in her shop—wetting sugar to make it weight heavier. And why didn't she send one of the boys after the horse, and not go herself? Musha, she's blind in one eye, and can't see very good out of the other, and then for her to go nosing and poking and mousing round in the dark like an ole owl. 'Tis too much nerve she had. Nerves indeed!" with a sniff.

"Well, of all the aggravating mortals I ever met, Mrs Sharp, you're that one. A person wud have to be like Lot's wife not to mind you—a stone or a stick."

"I fear me that too many of me neighbors are like Lot's wife—looking over their shoulder at other people's concerns, when they had ought to be attending to their own affairs. Can't even leave a poor school teacher alone. I put me foot down on such curiosity."

"When you put that delicate foot of yours down on anything, 'tis finished, be



that thing a worm or a turtle," said Mrs. Dormer, icily. "If you lived in the days of the Indians, sure they wouldn't be able to get snowshoes to fit you wid your splay feet."

"You can't speak without getting personal, Mrs. Dormer. I could wear small shoes, I guess, if I was vain enough to squeeze my feet, like some other people; but give me comfort or nuthin'. Remember, me good woman, even the worm will turn when you walk on his tail. Job answered them on the dunghill. I would say I want no reflections cast on me foot, fer it's me own anyhow, which can't be said of a certain woman's teeth."

"Sure, to hear you, we would think you as beautiful as Cleopatter, Mrs. Sharp, the way you talk."

"Well, anyhow, Mrs. Dormer, there is some shape and form to me, which ain't true of you; you would need a stove-grate to hold in your waist, and give you figure."

Mrs. Dormer's bulk shook with suppressed rage, and a rich flush suffused her broad nose.



"'Tis character, not shape, that counts in this world, Mrs. Sharp. Beauty is skin deep."

"Character! Well, I have as much character and conscience as you."

"Such a woman! You're like a crow that plucks the bones even of the dead. I heard you tearing out Maria Ford—God rest her soul!—the day before she died."

"True for you, but if I did, I went to her funeral, and put flowers on her grave."

"A plaster is a poor return for a broken head."

"A plaster is a better return than no return at all."

Mrs. Dormer was the very personification of holy scorn and righteous indignation.

"Mrs. Sharp, the one you pelted and pasted with stones, while she was living, will get flowers from you now that she's dead. You're like the man that stole the duck, and then to do penance, and ease his conscience, gave its feathers away to a poor lone widdy fer her pillow. The Gospel says something about killing the prophets, and then building up fine tombs fer 'em."



"The divil always cud quote Scripture in his own cause, Mrs. Dormer."

"The divil surely would have more sense than to quote Scripture when you're round, fer you'd be certain to perwert the text. You must be fine at perwerting the Gospel, since you're so mighty good at perwerting characters of people."

"Hi-yi! Mrs. Dormer, the pot calling the kittle black. I see the divil kin turn preacher. The Scriptures tells us that he comes as an angel of light. You ought to be in the pulpit, me good woman, but you'd have to preach better than you practice."

"Faith, then, if I was preaching, you'd mighty soon find out, me dear woman, that your pew is not your bedstead. Ah! 'tis a pity your face is not one-half as long as your foot, then would you be rated as a religious woman."

Mrs. Dormer now struck an attitude, and folded her arms dramatically. She had observed the bishop closely, when he spoke at the church's dedication.

"Tain't no use in scattering good seeds on hard stones," said she, in stentorian tones, "fer the thorns will grow up, and



choke you. Don't throw your seed before swine," with a majestic gesture, "fer they will tear it to pieces. Mrs. Sharp, you kin go to the divil."

With her head held very high, Mrs. Dormer's mighty form billowed away from the fence, leaped, elephant-like, over a small gooseberry bush, leaving a strip of calico on a slender branch, and flung through the doorway of her home.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE COAL MINE JOAN OF ARC.

There were soft glances as well as black looks cast on Asa Robinson, the newspaper reporter, who was staying at Farringdon. He was a well made fellow, with the odor of city life and experience clinging to him.

He had no small admiration for the coal-region girls; they were so naïve, so fresh, like violets with the dew on them.

He felt that he had fallen in love with Babbie Conway, and he was half afraid of her. He would resolve every morning to avoid seeing her, and a hour or two later, would find himself loitering about where he thought she might be. Things had now come to such a pass that he meant to make her an offer as soon as he thought advisable.

The sun was pouring down his fiery beams, as his flaming chariot whirled through the heavens. The dust, hot and burning, flew in clouds into the air with every disturbing footfall. Heat poured



from the blackened roofs of the houses; heat shot in strong rays from the coal banks; heat glanced off the creek's glassy face. The day, as if palsied, lay mute and aghast.

The silence of Farrington was broken. The very air was quivering with voices; women chattering over fences and through windows; men in groups, with their fists clenched, talking vehemently together.

Asa Robinson held his hat in his hands, as he spurned the ground with his new patent leather slippers. He noticed that a number of men, with naturally and artificially dark faces, looked viciously at him, and that a curse or two fell from lips that were curled in dislike of him.

He suspected that he was in danger, and prepared to escape. He had seen the face of Mrs. Kelly scowling from a window. Robinson had the head of a goose and the heart of a hen; squawking all day, and ready at the least sound to fly.

Almost before he knew it, a young fellow, about his own age, tapped him on the shoulder with mock courtesy. Robinson recognized him at once; the fellow whom Babbie Conway had addressed as



"Ned" on the day that Robinson saw her cross the swollen creek. He looked from under his lashes at the miner's hands of jointed steel.

"Mr. Newspaper," said the miner, "we don't like to treat you unfair, but you ain't been fair with us, so we will pay you in your own money. We'll give you a chance, though; we don't do no mean things, because we want to act like men. You kin fight for your life. I'm your man. Stand back, boys."

He waved his hand to the crowd surging like a shoal of dolphins around him.

"Don't fear, Mr. Newspaper; the fellas won't get at you. You have got only one man to fight; that's me. If you lick me, the fellas here will cheer you, and I'll shake hands with you."

Asa Robinson looked into his antagonist's face; a good-looking, square-jawed, fresh face with manhood and character in every line of it. The reporter's nature prompted him to show the white feather and cringe, but his common sense told him that such a trick were useless. He was every whit as stout and strongly-



made as the miner and every inch as tall. He had to take his chances.

The miner waited for him to strike first; and he did—a clip on the chin. Then the world got suddenly bright for Robinson; a sheet of red flame which seemed one immense mass of shooting stars. He became conscious that his eye was bleeding.

The miner was kneeling beside him, when a clatter of hoofs was heard, heavy hoofs that struck resoundingly on the stones. Every eye turned from the prostrate man in the direction of the noise, and saw—

A girl, beautiful as an angel, yet with the fire of an Amazon in her black eyes; hatless, her thick dark hair tossing like a mane on her shoulders; her small brown hands clutching tightly the bridle of the sweating mule upon which she rode, as graceful, as daring, as bewitching as Camilla herself.

Straight as an arrow, fearless as an eagle, she dashed into the crowd that fell away on each side of her. It was Babbie Conway.

As soon as the mule came within sight



of Robinson, Babbie leaped to the ground, and ran to where he lay with his head on the miner's arm.

"He's not hurt much, I hope," she said, wiping the blood from his face with her handkerchief.

"No," replied the reporter, lifting himself on his elbow, and looking into the girl's flushed, handsome face.

One of his eyes was shut tight and quite purple, but the other looked the admiration he felt for her.

"I have been playing 'possum for the past five minutes. I wanted to keep one eye presentable," he added, with rare good humor.

He seemed to know no fear since her arrival, and now got on his feet.

The miner's blue eyes were riveted on Babbie's face, too, with a look of admiration, such as painters give to the eyes of simple pagans before their idol. His hands were clenched, and there was jealousy now in the set muscles of his jaws. He saw the lover like air of the reporter.

The mob had been silent, struck dumb by the apparition of this lovely girl, but they were getting uneasy. The reporter,



according to their view, had not got sufficient punishment; he should be taught a severe lesson; should be made feel that he couldn't cartoon his betters with impunity.

"Don't mind the beauty, Ned," shouted out a voice in the crowd. "Do him up for fair, even if he is her mash. Don't let a woman conquer you."

A great cabbage, which had been intended by Mrs. Sharp for the reporter, now came whirling like a cannon-ball, and crushed the speaker's hat down over his eyes.

The miner and the reporter studied Babbie's face. It had such a color as tinges the clouds at sunset or dawn. She groped blindly, and her words came brokenly. Tears quivered on her eyelashes.

"I am shamefully misunderstood, Ned," she said, placing one small hand on the miner's sleeve. "I never thought of that. I had heard that a mob was beating a man to death. I knew such a thing would be a blot on us all. I came to save him and us. Oh!"

She put her hands over her face.

"More credit to you, Babbie," said a



woman who had pushed her way through the men to the girl, and heard her words. "It's a shame. The man as said that kin stand out, and Polly Dormer will lick him."

She slid her arm around Babbie.

"Don't let them beat the reporter. See to it, won't you, Ned?" said Babbie, drawing her unbound hair about her face.

"Because you've asked it," said the miner, reverently, "he will get no more than he has, providing he shakes the dust of Farrington from his heels."

"Yes, let him do that."

Then she was gone with Mrs. Dormer, and disappeared through that worthy dame's front doorway. The mule ran galloping up the road.

Asa Robinson, escorted by Ned Higgins, retreated to his hotel, the men falling back at a few words from Higgins.

And in half an hour, Farrington was as still as ever; no noise, but the insects in the air, and the old sulphur creek.



## CHAPTER IX.

### JOAN OF ARC'S CONQUEST.

"That's her every time," said Hannah Conway to her lover, Ned Higgins. "Always doing things that ain't bad, but that any other women would be afraid to do. Babbie will lose her life some day for somebody else."

"She was riding on the back of that there ole mule that's always prowling about here, when some one said a crowd of fellas were killing the newspaper reporter. Heavens! she was off like lightning. Sure, I kin never keep track of her, no more than I could of them swallows in our chimley, that dip their wings at me, and skip away."

"And she cried, you say. That's my poor girl, she never feels how sore the bruise is at her heart, till some one presses it. The people talk shamefully about her."

It was a balmy evening. Glittering noon had gone, and purple night was coming.

They were sitting on the porch



together; Ned a noble-looking giant; Hannah, a feminine edition of her homely old father, her hair of no particular color, her figure unworthy of mention either for grace or awkwardness.

Truly no man could seek out Hannah Conway for her beauty of person; yet the kindness in her eyes and in every line of her face, the good humor that smiled around her mouth, made up for her lack of charm.

Now her work-worn hands were folded in her lap, and her eyes were fastened on the red-golden splash of color in the western sky. She looked at the red west till the red ran from the sky to the hills, and all became a sheet of red fire. Happy Hannah! Love had found its way into her quiet heart. Oh if the man by her side only knew of his power over her!

"Do you think she cares about that newspaper fella, Hannah?" Ned asked the question eagerly.

"Care for him?" was the scornful reply. "You don't know Babbie. You have heard talk about her. Wait until you understand her better. But the fella has to leave here?"



"Yes and at once. If he's here tomorrow morning, heaven pity his bones. He's got warning enough."

Two hours after sunset, Babbie Conway was leaning on the back gate with her chin in her hand. There was melancholy in her eyes and hanging about her pretty mouth. Perhaps she was reflecting, reflecting about her mad marriage, or her action of that day, though Babbie seldom reflected.

Deep in the woods, a sad whip-poor-will wailed out his vesper psalms, while echo sang an alternate verse. A bat, that flying speck of dusk-time, winged its way by Babbie's head. A foot-fall on the ashes strewn through the alley startled her. She peered into the darkness, expecting to see one of the neighbors, when her eyes recognized Asa Robinson, the condemned reporter.

"Miss Conway!"

He came very close to her. She could see that his face was on fire with passion.

"Mr. Robinson, I thought that by this time you were on your way to the city. Mind, you have been threatened, so don't stay. If you do, you are running a risk.



Why didn't you leave on the evening train? Why are you here?"

"For you; you must leave with me."

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Is it an insult for a man to offer his love and his name? I will marry you at the first opportunity."

"Mr. Robinson," her reply was quick and sharp, "I thank you, but I cannot accept your offer. Perhaps you do not know that, young as I am, I am a widow."

"What of that? I love you. Why did you save me to-day, if you didn't care for me?"

"To preserve the reputation of our men; I feared they might inflict death. That was my only reason."

"God, how I deceived myself! Tell me, do you love any one else?"

The question was like a dash of cold water. Why did her heart leap up?

"Answer me, do you love that big chap who gave me the clip over the eye? He loves you, I can see."

She faltered a little, then blazed out:

"Of course, you look for no answer to that question. If you do, you are going to taste disappointment."



She was like a beautiful flash of harmless lightning.

"You do love him, you can't deny it. You reject me for a half-civilized savage, a boor. The only polishing he got was with a scoop shovel."

"Polish doesn't count with a sensible woman. The polish comes off too easily, like the delicate tint on a plum. A little scratch, and we see under the varnish; beneath the Russian skin, we find the Tartar nature. Cheap education, young man, too often passes for true worth.

"But whether I love a miner or no, I have told you I cannot marry you. If to-morrow my good looks took wings, like old Noah's raven, and flew away, never to return, your love, like the dove, would mighty soon follow."

Her nerves were quivering; not because she cared for the weak-faced man before her, but because his question frightened her. Babbie had learned sufficient about her nature to fear herself.

"So you, a woman like you, a woman with all your tact and beauty and grace and charm and cleverness, and a sort of peculiar genius, you would marry a miner,



when you could be my wife, and have a comparatively easy life! Think of the anxieties of a miner's wife; she suffers not only the real dangers and evils her husband encounters in the deep mines, but those also which her fears suggest. And then the wretched poverty!"

"Love, Mr. Robinson, can make poverty endurable and even pleasant. Poverty draws the husband and wife nearer together; he stints for her, she sacrifices herself for him. The wife lying in silken sloth does not love her husband more than the wife who works from morning till evening, to make ends meet; the wife upon the end of whose toil the sun never sets.

"A miner is king in his own home; wealth does not there share the dominion with him. He is all in all to his wife; her heart is not divided between him and the pleasures of the world. He is her idol; and gowns, theatres, operas, pink teas, and society cannot win her from his worship.

"A miner has no such gifts for his wife, so she thinks not of the gifts of her lover, but the love of the giver. She



lives for him, he lives for her; he is her happiness, she his—like two planets, one shedding light and splendor on the other.

“Mark you, I can speechify as well as you. But here we are, a precious pair of idiots, seriously talking of a husband, when I have not even a real lover.”

“Let me be your lover, and I shall soon be your husband. The fire of my love will set your heart aflame, and then will you look at me with eyes of meek surrender.”

“Hardly! Like the salamander, my heart is proof against love’s fire; isn’t at all combustible, is wrapped in a sort asbestos. So don’t waste your sparks.

“Moreover, I looked at one man with eyes of meek surrender, and that surrender was my Waterloo; life has been a kind of rocky island for me ever since; and believe me,” sighing, “at times I find my path hard and thorny.

“Perhaps, like some of your city women, after a few husbands, I might get used to the marriage state, but my first attempt, ugh!” with a shudder, “it was awful. Trial number one taught me a



lesson. I am willing to act Evangeline, and braid St. Catherine's tresses for the remainder of my days. My first love began in folly, and ended in repentance.

"A woman is a fool to marry, for then she must cling close to her husband. There is no way out of it; she must play the vine to his oak. She sticks to him, and he sticks to his vices."

"You made a bad start, little girl—child, for you are nothing else. All men are not like your late husband, who, from what I hear, was a pretty bad sort of chap, and old enough to have better sense. There is no use in crying over spilt milk."

"No; you, I suppose, would advise me to call the cats,"—lightly.

"I would advise you to marry again; marry me, and have a future."

"You know what people say I am. The cymbals of criticism have made much ado and a brazen clashing about me."

"Fiddlesticks! I would stake my life on your honor. To me you are like limpid water in a crystal vase."

"A future for Babbie Conway! Can a woman like me have a future? The



world is always and ever talking of a man's future and a woman's past. But enough of this chatter. You have my answer, Mr. Robinson."

Nowise daunted, he continued:

"I don't get on well in my love-making."

"No; it's rather slow, like pulling teeth, or teaching a baby his prayers."

The lightning had all gone from her eyes now, and sunshine was there.

"Of course, I feel like a fool," he confessed. "A man hates to be made a joke and laughing-stock of. I feel like a fool that was catching at a shadow, and following after the wind."

"After a will-o'-the-wisp, I suppose? Look out; it may lead you into a swamp, and the strikers may get you. You are running a frightful risk."

"I realize that fully. Here I am with a sword hanging over my head."

"I should say rather, a brickbat. Cut and run."

"Girlie, you're like a brook; you babble so, but it's musical babbling."

"The babbling of a brook is soon forgotten."



"But you, Babbie, I shall never forget, never, never. Just to be near you makes my heart go pitpat."

"And makes mine go pity Robinson. But I have nothing except pity to give you."

"You are cold. You remind me of the snow images I used to model as a boy. But you are a snow-covered volcano; under that icy surface, there is a passionate heart. Like your own anthracite, that heart may be slow to enkindle, but it will hold long the flame of love."

"An end to poetry and love-making, Mr. Robinson. Less than a year ago, I was a child; I dreamed a child's, a girl child's, dream. A dreamer, I walked of my own will into what seemed a golden little stream. It rose about me; I could neither go forward, nor retrace my steps; it claimed me as its own; I was a prisoner. I longed for death, if a young person can really long for death. Death came, but not to me. Now the stream I meet again, but I shall step no more into its sparkling ripples."

"Girlie, what a poet's mind you have! You seem cleverer every time I see you."



"Poet! I am trying to dress up in flowers the hard, ugly, real skeleton of my marriage. Why should I tell the plain, unvarnished tale which you have heard a hundred times in this village? I must say good night, good-bye, Mr. Robinson. I wish you well."

She turned towards the house, but he reached through the palings of the fence, and caught one of her hands.

"I cannot leave without you."

"But you must. Please let go of my wrist."

She twisted herself free. A volley of oaths slipped from his lips.

"You are a damned witch, a devil—the worst kind of a devil, a she-devil. By **all** the infernal deities, I'll kiss you."

He attempted to throw open the gate.

"Is that the language of doves?" she replied, with that tantalizing laugh of hers. "You have got drink in you, I see. So much the worse for yourself; you need a cool head till you get away from Farringdon."

"You are like wine to a man's brain."

"Say whiskey; it's more common up here, and that's the unclean devil that is talking in you now, Mr. Robinson."



“Mr. Robinson! I want you to call me Asa.”

“Pardon my harshness, but I had rather call you Assa—ass—jackass; it would be—”

He managed to pull the gate open, but she had seized an old broom leaning against the fence. It was now a farce for her.

“Act the gentleman, and I promise not to hit you.”

He glugged his eyes with her beauty, there under the purple heavens and white stars, and forgot himself.

He prided himself on his strength—where a woman was concerned. It was characteristic of Asa Robinson to take advantage of the weak; all his friends knew that. A Sinon with men, he always played Achilles with women.

He threw one arm about Babbie's waist. There was a swash; another; the broom did excellent work; his derby hat was knocked down on his ears. Babbie now was gurgling with laughter. Her moods changed like a chameleon's colors. She pushed him through the gateway.

“Perhaps I had better call my father.



You may run against a bear in trying to catch a hare," she said, whereat Robinson became very collected and rational.

"Good-bye, sir," she turned towards the house. "Be careful."

Hearing the gate open again, Babbie turned round indignantly, expecting to see the reporter. Instead she saw the pale face and shining eyes of Meg Kennelly.

"Was that the newspaper fella I met in the alley?" she asked. "Well, if you care for him, Babbie, or value his life, for God's sake, call him back, and hide him somewhere. Dominick, me husband, has stirred up a big crowd of the loafers at old Nancy Cook's tavern, and they are hunting all around for Robinson. They will come up here, for they think you are great with that fellow. Old Mrs. Kelly said you were, and that you sent him to get those funny pieces out of her for the newspapers."

Babbie sped down the alley to Robinson's side. He saw a woman flee noiselessly around the fences, a black shawl over her head. He and Babbie



had scarcely reached Conway's gate, when there was a babel of men's voices, among which her sharp ear detected Dominick Kennelly's.

"Not a sound. Come," she whispered.

Down the board walk and into the kitchen, then up the stairway, she guided him.

"Hide," she pointed to a clothes' closet.

She had just returned to the kitchen, when Dominick Kennelly entered, followed by a crowd of tipsy strikers.

"Where's that city lover of yours? He came in here with you; I saw him. Where is he, you little limb of the divil?" roared Kennelly.

Babbie knew that Ned Higgins was sitting in the next room with Hannah, and must have heard. On the table was a fresh custard-pie which Hannah had baked for Higgins. Quick as a flash, Babbie balanced the pie in her hand, then it landed full on Kennelly's face. The other strikers laughed.

The door between the kitchen and the front room opened with a bang,



and the angry countenance of Ned Higgins appeared. Hannah put her arm about Babbie, and looked with love at the poor little pale face.

"You had better git out of this, Kennelly!" cried Higgins, sternly, "or you will get hit with something harder than a custard."

"Who was the man that come in here with you, you—"

Kennelly could not finish the sentence; Higgins had him by the throat and was shaking him as a dog would a rat.

"Ask the question respectable-like," said Higgins, "if you want an answer."

"Who was that man?" demanded Kennelly, clearing his throat.

Babbie was herself now.

"That man," she turned her starry black eyes full on her protector, "was Ned Higgins."



## CHAPTER X.

### LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

Hannah gave Babbie an encouraging squeeze. Ned winked at the other strikers.

"A wrong scent, lads," said he; "the whiskey got into Kennelly's nose, and put him hunting on the wrong track. Good night!"

The men laughed till the kitchen rang again. Kennelly was no little abashed.

"A joke on you, Dominick!" floated back from the garden, as the strikers filed out to continue their search.

"That fella got plenty warning," said Higgins, the old jealous fire burning in his bright blue eyes. "He had a right to go. Why did he stay?" he demanded, looking fiercely at Babbie.

She turned from a corpse-like whiteness to a crimson red, as if a scarlet curtain had cast a ruddy hue upon a marble wall. That flush was a sword thrust to the man's strong heart.

"You don't answer; then I will," he



persevered. "Robinson stayed because of you."

"Yes, I plead guilty; be-because of me, but I did not want it so. He will go away to-night," Babbie faltered. "The late train will be the safest for him to leave on, I dare say. Will you see him off safely, Ned?"

There was pleading in her voice, and the eyes that looked at him were as clear as an infant's.

"No," brutally; "he must see to himself. You are very interested in his safe journey. I guess before long you'll go, too, to meet him in the city, and marry him and—"

"Ned!" entreated Hannah.

"Hannah, he loves her, and coward as he is, that love made him brave for once, because—yes, because — why should I stop?—because she loves him. Coal region men ain't in her line; she wants a city chap fer husband."

Hannah attributed her lover's roughness to his great dislike of the reporter. Babbie turned toward the stove. A sob was strangling her, but strangle she would, rather than let it pass her lips.



She could not prevent the tears from welling up in her eyes. Higgins saw large pearly drops gemming her long lashes, and he cursed himself in his heart.

Hannah's ever ready tact prompted her to ask Higgins to enter the front room, which he did, leaving Babbie alone in the kitchen. The door was shut between the rooms.

Babbie sat down at the table, and sadly, vacantly stared at the custard smeared over the floor. Ever and anon, snatches of the conversation in the next room came to her.

"No, our Rose is well educated, but Babbie ain't, though she has read a sight of story-books. Oh, yes, you're right, she kin talk like a lady. You would think she had swalleyed a grammar; but Rose learned her that. Rose ain't no dumb skull," said Hannah's voice.

Higgins' rich baritone voice, about which there was nothing silvery, sounded as if it came from a deep iron vessel. It thrilled the girl in the kitchen, as he replied:

"What a pity she throwed herself away on that do-no-good Conrad Miller!" There was regret in his tone. "Still she's



got over that now, and after a while, she'll meet—meet somebody—else and maybe marry."

"No, she won't, never," whispered Babbie, stealing into the garden, with her eyes full of tears.

"I certainly am unlucky," she sobbed in her throat. "I believe old Mrs. Kelly was right; I am ill-starred. Ned, Ned, I understand all. Oh, my poor Hannah!"

When Babbie came back to the house, Higgins had gone. Hannah was in the kitchen, wiping up the custard. There was a damp handkerchief hiding in Babbie's bosom.

"Hannah, what a sin and a shame for me to waste pie so good as yours! And then you cleaning up the mess I made. Why, just this minute I returned to do that."

"Babbie how your eyes shine!"

"Do you think so? They oughtn't to shine, for they are very tired."

"Ah, Babbie, you can't fool your ole Hannah; you have been a-crying, and no wonder."

"For heaven's sake, Hannah, don't make me cry again by your sympathy."



There's nothing on earth a woman needs so much as a good cry now and then, though it reddens the nose shamefully, and is the worst possible thing for the eyes.

“But that newspaper man, we must get him to the train. I have hit on a plan for helping Mr. Robinson,” concluded Babbie, with mischief in her eye. “Dress him up as a woman.”

Hannah laughed.

"Pon me word, what kind of a girl are you? One minute crying, and the next ready to play any trick."

"This isn't a trick. Who knows but Kennelly and his gang are lying in wait somewhere along the road to do Mr. Robinson harm!"

"You kin dress him," said Hannah, chuckling. She came close to Babbie and grew earnest. "Everybody says you care for that fella?" Hannah looked dubiously at her.

“Everybody is wrong, then, Hannah dear. Anything I have done for him I have done out of kindness, nothing more. Was it my fault he ran after me? I made one great mistake, sister, and I



have not forgotten that. Do you think I shall rush headlong to make another? And such a man as Robinson, I could never fancy. Why, sister, he is round-shouldered from looking at the diamond in his shirt and his patent leather slippers. Men like that can't win women whose lullaby the coarse breaker machinery of a coal mine town has ground out."

As soon as Hannah disappeared into the front room, so soon did Babbie's gravity vanish. She opened the stairs door and called.

"Much war, my dear sir, has been fought over you; you are a perfect Napoleon," she said, when Robinson came to the kitchen.

"Yes," he rejoined, "a perfect Napoleon—who let somebody else do all the fighting."

"Discretion is the better part of valor. Your absence was more desirable than your presence at such a time. You were the safer—we all were safer, by your being in durance vile, in solitary confinement, playing Napoleon on St. Helena's Isle. The pen is mightier than the sword, you know, but the tongue is mightier than





the pen, particularly when the tongue knows how to fib. But to get down to business. You sit here till I get clothes to disguise you."

She was gone up the stairs like a flash, and soon returned. He remonstrated for a second, and made a wry face, as she offered him an armful of motley clothing.

"You had better put these clothes on, or you may fare badly," she cautioned. "Your own mother wouldn't know you in such gear. Your wardrobe is worthy of Julia Marlowe."

When the newspaper man was decked from head to foot, and wanted nothing to complete his attire, except the veil in his hand, Babbie, with a scream of laughter, brought Hannah.

She saw what looked like a "new woman." Two large feet, quite unlike the poet's "little mice," leered from under a ruffled skirt with big red spots in it. A shirtwaist which appeared the worse for wear and a sad misfit, was partly covered with a turkey red shawl. A lace collar was stretched around a thick, short neck; an immense hat with a wreath of rosebuds, some of which the



mice had opened, was flattened around the reporter's ears. Added to all this was his bruised eye which looked a dark spot in his face.

Babbie and Hannah laughed so heartily that Robinson was rather nettled, but when he had glanced into the cracked old looking-glass, he laughed himself.

"Great earthquakes!" he exclaimed. "Fearfully and wonderfully made."

"The veil I have given you is a heavy one," said Babbie, kindly. "Wrap it around your head. Once on the train, you can throw the clothes out the window, unless you want to keep them for your friends to see."

"Won't you come with me to the station?"

"There is no reason why I should," was Babbie's reply; "you know the way. Besides, I should draw on you the suspicion of Kennelly and his followers if they saw me. I am a dangerous friend for you to have at present. You must go alone."

"Good-bye," she added, giving him her hand, which he grasped and pressed to his bosom. "Don't hold up your skirts, Madam, and keep your bonnet on straight."



She laughed her sweet laugh, and pulled her hand out of his. Standing in the doorway, with his fingers on the knob, he looked longingly at her beautiful face; a ludicrous lover. But Babbie did not laugh again. She pulled the long veil from his hand, tied it around his face and hat, and whispering another "good-bye," pushed him out into the gloom of the night; then the door closed.

"I feel sorry for the poor fellow," said Hannah, sadly.

"So do I, but sorrow is about all I feel for him; and that isn't what he wants," returned Babbie. "Perhaps if I were Eve, and he Adam, I should marry him."

"Then you do care a little for him."

"I said I should marry him if he were Adam, for then he would be the only man on earth. But jokes aside, you're tired, Hannah dear; run up to bed, and I'll follow after a while."

Dominick Kennelly, sitting at the well lighted tavern, noticed the female figure passing down the road, and whistled at her. She nervously drew her veil closer about her face, and blessed the farsightedness of a certain little girl.



"I never could care for a coward like him, nor for that half-fire, half-smoke sort of love," Babbie mused, as she sat down in the kitchen. "A man of his stripe won't love any woman for a great length of time. I have an idea that I know a wee bit about human nature. My good looks caught his eye, of course."

Two men thought of Babbie that night; one, while at the little station, waiting for the late train; the other tossing on his hard bed, a straw tick.

"I can't get her," growled the one at the station, wiping his feet against the suitcase, "so I have to forget her, but it will take a deuced long time. Cut out by a miner, too. A fellow whom I imagined I needn't fear any more than I would the Angel Gabriel. I have a feeling she likes Higgins, despite all her nightingale philosophizings.

"And as deaf to my words as the surges that rise in the November Atlantic; harder to soften than her home anthracite, or the rocks of her native mountains. But she's not like other women; as much of the dove as the swallow about her; as delicate to look at as



Venetian glass, and as hardy and strong as a stone crock. She will marry that bull of a miner. I envy you, Ned Higgins. Why, to get her, I would go as far as Orpheus went."

"I'm a beast, a dog," groaned the miner, pounding the bed with a sledge-hammer of a fist. "Hannah loves me, I made her do it, and now the little one has carried me off me feet. The poor little divil, every one has a pluck at her, except the old fella and Hannah."

He fell to pitying Babbie—a dangerous pastime.

"The little witch done wrong, of course, but what kin you expect of her? She is only a youngster, and she is well sorry."

He knew in his heart that if Hannah had done such a thing, he would never have forgiven her, though she was only four years older than Babbie; but somehow the thing did not seem so bad in Babbie's case. Love smokes our glasses, when we look at the faults of a dear one.

"I wonder if I had seen her before she run off with that dirty cuss—damn him! they say he hit her—her! I wonder if I



could have made her love me, like Hannah does? Maybe I could make her care for me now; but there's Hannah, dear poor good Hannah! Oh, if Hannah was only Babbie, or if only I had never seen that little thing!"



## CHAPTER XI.

### BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY.

Babbie had always leant upon Hannah, had always gone to her for sympathy and soothing words; the older sister had never seemed to need such kindness. Why, then, should this chapter find Hannah with her head on Babbie's bosom, her tears wetting Babbie's calico dress, while Babbie, with a blind look in her lovely eyes, a death-like pallor on her healthy face, whispered words of loving consolation?

"Don't, don't, Hannah dear; there is no need for these fears; all will come right."

"But he told me last night that he can't marry me, because he's got fonder of you than me. He did love me afore he seen you."

"Then would that the train I came home on had plunged into the river! Hannah, there must be persons born with a curse on their heads. Look at the misery I have caused and the heartache."



"Babbie, I can't listen to that. God wouldn't be God to leave innocent babies come into the world with curses on their poor little heads. You ain't done much wrong. Any girl might be a bit full of life, like yourself. And about the train, that was awful to say."

"What does Ned mean to do, Hannah?"

"He acted the man, never fear. He said he would marry me, if I wanted things that way, since he promised, but he thought it fair I ought to know his feelings. I said he should marry you then, and not mind me. To-night he is going to ask pap about how to act, and then he will talk to you."

Babbie for a brief period was silent, thinking deeply.

"You said he should marry me, Hannah? But I won't marry him. It takes two to make a marriage, and I won't be dragged by hook or crook into wedlock again. Once was quite enough. I ran into the arms of a husband not a year ago, but I'd run to Jericho to escape a husband now."

"But Ned loves you, Babbie."



"He thinks he does. Do you want me to marry him?"

"No-o—yes."

"That's just like you, Hannah, my noble sister. You would give me even your husband and your future home.

"It was always so. I got everything, and you nothing. Education for me; housework for you, toil, drudgery; you you were ever the little mother. If there was money sufficient for one hat, Babbie got that hat, and Hannah wore her old one trimmed over. If we could not buy two dresses, I got a new gown, and you went without.

"Everything was Babbie's; she was like a greedy animal that snapped and gobbled up all things on all sides. With you, a dollar was always more than a hundred cents; with me, it was less than half.

"You, dear Hannah, ever played the part of the hen scratching and scraping; I had the role of the favorite chick, nothing too good for me.

"And then I repaid you and old daddy for all your kind, tender love by bringing disgrace and shame and sorrow on



your home. Babbie comes back, weary and sick to death and desolate, and Hannah forgives and forgets.

"Now Babbie must have the one love of Hannah's life, the only man that a woman like Hannah can love."

Then in a low, solemn tone that had in it the mournful music of a dirge, Babbie concluded:

"Hannah, if you love Higgins, as I know you do, save him from such a woman as I am. I have made good resolutions, of course, but who knows that I shall not trample them under foot? The way to hell is bricked with good resolves. Higgins must marry you, sweet sister; he is too good for me; and marry you he shall.

"Hannah, I ruined my life, why spoil the life of a good man and your life? I thought once that I loved; I braved the tongues of scandal, which to a woman is worst than death. The death agony is short, but the torture that disgrace inflicts is deathless. I threw myself on the rack of scandal, and I can't get off—scandal that scorches and brands, killing its victim by inches. Hannah, you don't



know what it costs me sometimes to smile and laugh and be gay."

Babbie burst into a flood of wild, impetuous tears, and before Hannah could restrain her, had flung her slight form upon the floor. Hannah's strong hands lifted her tenderly, and held her to her bosom, then laid her gently on the old lounge.

On earth there was no love holier than the love those sisters bore each other.



## CHAPTER XII.

### JOAN OF ARC AT THE STAKE.

In the evening when Babbie came home from Mrs. Sharp's, between whom and her had sprung up a friendship, she found her father and Ned Higgins sitting in the front room waiting for her. She smiled gayly at them, and took off her hat in her careless, graceful way.

Neither man dreamed how she had schooled herself for this interview; how under the cloak of her careless grace, she was lashing her heart into subjection, strangling the cries of her own passionate love. She looked as wilful, as saucy as ever when she met their anxious eyes. She noticed there was a register hole in the ceiling.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said, excusing herself. "I want to see Hannah."

She went lightly upstairs to her sister.

"Get down on your knees," she began playfully; "I don't mean that you kneel to me, but put your ear to this hole to



hear what goes on below. Don't get frightened at what I may say to Higgins; I want to knock the nonsense out of him."

She was in the front room. To prevent embarrassment, she began:

"I suppose, pap, Ned has spoken to you? Hannah has told me."

She never looked at Higgins, and her tone was anything but serious. Her manner seemed indifferent.

"Yes, Hannah and Ned has spoke to me, daughter. But I ain't got nothing to say in things of that kind. Hannah, be the way she talked to me, seems to be satisfied.

"When your mam and I courted—God rest her! —she did all the talking, for she was another Babbie. Little girl," he went close to her, "as you are to-night, so was your mother the night she laid her hand in mine, and held up her lips fer me kiss.

"Oh!" he dashed the back of his hand across his eyes to wipe away the tears, "old as I am, I can't forget; memory is young always. Your mother is living in you, me child," Babbie raised



her head to receive his kiss; "and fer husband, there isn't a man on earth I would pick out before Ned Higgins."

"You are too good to me, Mr. Conway," replied Higgins, playing with his hat.

"But I will leave youse two here alone. Old heads should clear out, when young hearts come together."

With a smile that was a benediction, Mr. Conway went into the kitchen.

Higgins stepped to her side. Her soul was on the rack, but her face showed no change; only her bosom rose and fell more rapidly, and now her fingers were threaded together.

He was about to speak, but she checked him with an imperious gesture. A picture of an anguished girl on her knees in the room above, listening for the death-knell of her future happiness, was a stay for Babbie.

"Mr. Higgins!"

He winced at her formality. Her words were lion's teeth upon him.

"You need say nothing of your attachment for me."

Her voice was cold, and she gazed



straight away from him. She could not look at the agony of the strong man by her side.

"It would be a pity for you to waste yourself on me; I am not like Hannah. I made a mistake, spoiled my life; I will never marry again."

Higgins felt the determination in her tone, but he rejoined:

"A child of sixteen talks of a spoiled life. Why, such a life isn't hardly begun."

"Yes, a spoiled life. A life can be spoiled at sixteen. How much a woman can learn in a year! Not a year ago, I was a happy girl; now my girlhood seems a century away."

"That feeling will leave you."

"Never."

"But I say it will. You will be a happy man's wife yet, and you will be happy."

"I shall never run such a great risk. Remember I have had experience; you have not. Only a sailor can speak of the storms of the sea. I took a sail in a sieve; and I had a splendid time of it; patching and darning up holes.

"The woman always get the worse end



of the bargain. She is an earthen pot, and marries a brazen vessel; as soon as there is a bump, she is sure to go to smash. When I married, I fondly imagined I was running into the garden of Paradise, but I found myself in a cabbage patch, where the cabbages were all cut; in an orchard where all the trees had been made stumps."

"Heavens alive! you don't believe all men are Conrad Millers?"

"Husbands are all chips of the same block, all pieces of the same goods, all sons of Adam. All are wasps out of the same nest; there may be a few good wasps, but they are not worth seeking for, because of the others."

He stared blankly at her, yet with admiration; her swift tongue made him dizzy, as if he had looked too long at a rapid stream of water.

"How you eye me!" she cried. "You look perfectly awful—as if you could gobble up a goat, and pick your teeth with the horns."

"You have a mighty queer way of talking, and I can't answer you as I would like," he said, simply. He was but snow



in the heat of argument with her. "One can't tell whether you are joking, or half in earnest. But I heard one school teacher say he found marriage a path of roses."

"Of course, *he* did, but I wonder how his wife found it? While Mr. Schoolmaster was teaching the young idea how to shoot, and treading his path of roses, his wife was tied to the stove leg in the kitchen, mending his socks to protect his feet from the thorns in his road of roses."

"What are women for," he persevered, "but to make men happy? Women are intended for marriage."

She nodded sarcastically.

"That's a man's idea. He thinks every girl is, hammer and tongs, after a husband. He pictures her as a kind of tempting pullet, strutting about with a notice on her neck: 'Chicken Stew To-Morrow.'

"A miner wants his wife to be like his hearth-fire—always of an equal flame and heat; but I am on the sky rocket order—a gay splash of sparks, and then a black silence. I would not suit you. Ours would be a cat-and-dog existence. You are not the kind of man I could care for; I should never be happy with you."



"You mean, I guess, that we would fight. Well, you could do all the fighting. I would sooner a slap in face from you than a kiss from any other woman."

"But I—I do not love you."

"You would have to love me. I have enough love for both, and in time—"

"I love the newspaper writer, Asa Robinson."

"You do not. Hannah told me everything, and I know from what she said that you don't care no more fer him than I do."

"You are starting to fight already. You might as well hit a woman as contradict her."

He grasped her hands in his Hercules palms. Babbie quivered, for she loved a master.

"You can't dodge with me, me little wild bird. Fly high, fly low, I'll ketch you. I am a man that can't and will not be put off. If necessary, I will use force to make you me wife."

Babbie strove to be calm, and treat the whole affair as a joke, but she made only a faint effort to get her hands free.



"Force! How jolly! Big chief he want squaw, he take squaw by hair and drag to his wigwam. Force used to be the thing in days gone by, when all the Americans wore feathers and war paint, and were copper-colored; but you can't cart a woman to the altar in the year 1902."

"Why won't you be my wife?"

"I told you; I don't love you."

He drew her very near, and gazed into her eyes; then Babbie broke away from him.

"I am not fit to be a miner's wife."

"Not fit!"

"No, not fit."

"You are riddling me."

"There has been much scandal talked over in this town about me," said Babbie, slowly and deliberately; "and you know a miner's wife should be above suspicion, for she is his most precious treasure, his pearl of great price. She is all he has. Poor in everything else, he is rich in the possession of his spotless wife. The breath of scandal has never come near Hannah. A dove with soiled wings is worse than a crow."



"A few old women did the talking, particularly Mrs Kelly."

"Everybody talked, everybody is talking. Everybody will tell you I am bad. Is everybody wrong, and am I right?"

"Your dad and Hannah know what you are, and they say you are as good as gold."

"Their testimony will not stand; it would not be taken in a court of justice. Love blinds their eyes to my faults and sins."

"What are you driving at? I certainly can't make you out."

"I am trying to spare your feelings."

"Well, I wisht you wouldn't, fer your words, as far as I kin see, mean queer things. I want more explanations."

"Mr. Higgins, I am too shallow for marriage; the wife's kitchen is too narrow for Babbie Conway. My heart is not big enough to love any one but my father and sisters. If I became your wife, you would come home some night to a deserted fireside."

"I am a fish that wants an ocean to swim in, not a brook; you understand what I mean. A bee should not marry



a butterfly. I don't want a plodding career as a wife; I hate harness; I prefer a gay lover to a serious husband. Your honor would not be safe with such a wife. Don't throw your love away, Mr. Higgins; Hannah deserves it, I do not."

Crushed and dejected, he fell into a chair. His castle of hopes had toppled and crashed upon his head. Once he looked at her face; no further hope there, it was as blank as a desert. He groaned, his love had received so cruel a bruise.

His reverence was crying out in anguish, to find such frailty, such fickleness in that revered little girl. Babbie had succeeded well.

"A bee should not marry a butterfly," he said, echoing her words, "because the butterfly will leave him. Butterfly is an ugly name for a woman." He staggered to the door. "A gay lover, not a serious husband."

Then with flames of anger sparkling in his fine eyes, he returned to her side. Like a delicate plant shrinking before the strong rays of the sun, she avoided his furious gaze.



"The world is a bad world just because of women like you. The world is full of bad men just because of women like you. Women like you spoil men's lives, ruin and destroy men's characters. Men can't help getting heels over head in love with women like you, and so men do mad, crazy things, and make themselves slaves and lackeys to such women. They give the woman everything fer her smile, and her smile is about all they git. Why don't you smile now, why don't you laugh at my destruction?"

He paused.

Babbie clenched her hands, and pressed her lips together in pain. Steel whips of grief were cutting fiery lashes into her heart. She was listening to the death-knell of his esteem for her.

She crept away from him to the old faded lounge, and sank gratefully upon its hard lap. Her eyes studied vacantly the pattern of the rag-carpet. But she was not yet to escape.

"I am going from you to-night as the the divil went out of heaven. I can't see no good in nothing no more; everything is bad and deceiving and a lie. I



have a good mind to git drunk, and join Kennelly, and go over and tackle those scabs of strike-breakers, and git shot, and go to—well, it doesn't matter to you where I go. Me faith in good is lost forever more."

Before she could articulate a syllable, the door banged, and she was alone.

"Oh!" it was a long drawn out moan from the desolate girl—as if a lamb, unheeded, had crept away from its flock into the darkness to die. "I seem lost in a vale of thorns; seem drifting out into the misty, unknown sea; seem like a poor exile treading the stony mountain path away from the dear green fields and laughing loved voices of the valley. Oh, God, am I never even to cast back a yearning look?

"Never till I die, shall I forget that look on his face; the look that told me I had damned myself in his eyes. I made him believe that I wanted money and influence. I said I loved Robinson. A daisy from Ned for my hair, I should prize more than a jewel from Robinson.

"I must have been mad, mad to say such terrible things; mad to blacken my



character in the eyes of such a man; mad to picture myself as a wanton. But it seemed the only way. Dear God, Thou knowest how I crucified my own heart—but," wildly, "perhaps I have murdered a man's immortal soul! Oh, I must not think, I must not think! 'Tis done."

With swift steps, she left the room, and went upstairs, her heart plunged into a black well of grief, and the bitter waters corroding it.

Hannah had been praying at the bedside, but when Babbie entered the room, she leaped to her feet, a great question shining in her eyes.

"Babbie, I didn't listen at the register-hole; it seemed kind of mean, so I just prayed and prayed, and waited for you to come and tell me. My, you were long; it was like ten years. But you are excited. Be calm, dear."

"Yes, yes, it's joy, Hannah, joy. He will marry you, I know he will. He may keep away from you for a short time, but he'll come back to you, he'll come back."

"Babbie, you are not like yourself.



Why, you act like you had a fever, or was walking in your sleep."

"I am excited, for I quarreled with him. But believe me, he will make you his wife."

Babbie sat on the bed, while Hannah, now on her knees, was kissing her sister's passive hands in gratitude.

Babbie looked through the open window out at the bleak, stony mountain road; a road that seldom felt the touch of any foot save her own; a road that stretched out in the faint light of the moon like her own existence.

In her little world, the sun had been extinguished forever, and the moon, now a frightful dark monstrous body, rolled round and round, but gave no light to the darkened planet of her life.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BLOODLESS BATTLE.

The clock in the kitchen struck one. Babbie, who had been feigning sleep for hours, arose from beside her now sleeping sister, and crept downstairs.

Nature was taking her revenge. Every nerve in Babbie's little body was on fire, her eyes were bursting, a band of red-hot metal seamed her heart and brain. The delicate woman's frame had been too severely tried.

Out into the night, dark and still, the sky barred with sombre clouds, through which peeped the moon, like a fair cloistered nun.

Babbie closed the kitchen door softly and locked it, and put the key into her bosom, whose panting tenant seemed trying to leap forth.

The grapevine fanned her with its moist leaves, and tried to tangle its pensile tendrils in her dark hair. At the back of the house, a little currant bush sighed with every passing breath of air, and a



family of slumbering blue and white phlox tossed restlessly in their dreams. A lanky hollyhock was casting his seed to the wind, each tiny black grain a winged life.

Babbie stood motionless, listening to the voices of the night—a whip-poor-will's doleful notes, which echo multiplied; a few uneasy crickets which chattered of their troubles, and eased their consciences; with here and there a lordly cock calling out to his feathered harem that all was well.

Like a thing of the night herself, she glided through the back gateway, stumbled over a tomato can in the alley, soiled her shoes with ashes, flung there by a careless hand.

Along the dusty road, under the little trestle, upon which the boys were wont to sit, and squirt tobacco juice and whittle white chips down into the dirt. Along by a potato garden, encircled with a tumble-down fence; around the huge rock bank, on which was stretched, like a dead serpent, the scraper line; under the horrible breaker, whose shadows, like monstrous beasts, seemed eager to devour



the girlish form. The small pieces of coal crackled under her feet.

She was now beyond the colliery, where long timbers lay, like a sleeping alligators, ready to snap, if disturbed; where lumber was heaped in piles; where empty mine cars stood rusting, chained together, like a string of idle convicts.

There was an old shanty in which the sprags were made. The roof had holes in it, and mounds of sun-burnt, rain-bleached chips lay about it, but there were no new sprags. A heap of worn-out machinery, screws, and bolts was gathered near the car tracks.

She crossed the railroad, and was on the little bridge, beneath which a tiny ribbon of water quivered. She could see the pond sleeping in the green gloom of the woods, the cloudy magnificence of the sky mirrored on the glassy surface. Tiny shrubs and clumps of brush and frail ferns grew by the road on her right, while on her left, high culm banks towered to the heavens.

Now she was climbing the mountain with rapid strides; physical exertion was relief. Her shoes were worn and thin-



soled, and the stones of the mountain road rough and sharp.

Rains had washed deep ruts into the ground, where yellow dust had settled, which at every step flew into the air. A bloated toad hopped hastily across her path, and tumbled into a ditch. She trod on a long, slender snake, which had curled up in the warm dust, and was dozing. A warning hiss, and the reptile glided away into the underbrush and blackberry bushes.

Shadows and lights played at hide and seek on the road. The moon whimsically cast her light through the overhanging trees, and drew upon the highway maps of fantastic design, filigree work, and Japanese gods.

Babbie paused for a moment, and looked back into the valley. Enwrapping the coal banks was a silver mist, in which fireflies darted, like stars of the earth. A passenger train, miles away, lumbering along through the tenebrous bosom of a swamp, looked like a huge glowworm.

Then she sank to the ground, and sobbed out the sorrow which, like a foul, cold viper in a robin's nest, had stolen in-



to her heart, and driven away her peace.

Through a rift in the clouds, the moon saw a piteous, slender, lissome figure lying on a green patch near the mountain top; a figure that writhed and moaned and screamed, like a poor bird, wounded, bleeding, and alone, dragging along on a broken wing, gemming the grass with the ruby drops of its heart.

Under the moonlit, dewy dark mountain pines, she told to the pitiful, listening silence the sorrow she could pour into no mortal ear. The affrighted air carried on its scented wings the mournful notes of her voice to the brooding birds, and the tiny passionate hearts within those downy breasts, strong in their own love, murmured sympathy.

The moon fled, and all was silence, the very darkness holding its breath.

Silence on the misty mountain top; silence in the deep glade, where hid the timid hare and the crafty fox; silence down in the painted valley—silence as soothing as if time had laid down his scythe in this forest, and were resting; silence as profound as that before the winds were made.



How much the human body can suffer! What torment, what crucifixion, but how much more the poor human heart! The body can seek consolation, often the heart cannot.

How sharp is the pain of unapparent wounds! How bitter the agony we must not show; the anguish which chokes and suffocates us, yet which we dare not communicate to others, and ask their help! Oh, if the dumb earth could only tell of the woe that little girl sobbed out into its maternal bosom! Oh, if that grassy spot could show a picture of the pangs it witnessed that night; could echo the sad words it heard!

At length, the rage and fury of Babbie's grief spent itself, like a storm subsiding.

She found a graveled, sandy, stony path which led to the road, crossed a fallen lichen-covered old tree, and was slowly wading through a sea of flowerless daisy plants, when the sound of a man's footsteps on the road startled her. Fortunately neighboring elms cast a deep shadow over the dell in which she was



She sank to her knees, parted the long grasses and plants which waved above her head, and peeped cautiously out.

Ned Higgins was standing not ten yards away, having just penetrated to the road from the opposite side of the woods. His hat was in his hand. The clouds, chasing one another, left the moon shining in undimmed glory, and her pure light fell upon Higgins' strong, manly, handsome face, where a troubled mind had left its mark. The watching girl saw the lines about his mouth and the shadows under his eyes.

"I thought I heard Babbie's voice; I was sure I did," he muttered aloud. "But I must be seeing things; she would never be here at this hour of the night."

Dejectedly, he kicked his way through the dust, and hat in hand, went down the mountain side away from Farringdon.

Babbie, from her billow of grass, looked after the noble head and flat, square back. Tears glistened in her eyes, like the drops of crystal on the sleeping elms' leaves. She started to her feet, and trampled to death a rakish grass-



hopper that lay drunk with dew. Then she turned from Higgins, and fled down the mountain to her home.

It was not a night bird that softly rustled at Conway's gate, though the little body made scarcely more noise than a bird as it entered. A forlorn girl with weary eyes stole into the poor bed by her tired sister's side. Babbie had fought her battle, with no one to see her struggles but God, and she won.

Battles like hers are going on every day, all around us—awful battles with nature, noiseless and without the shedding of blood, and the victory is very precious. We know little of those battles and care less. But many like her, the numerous black sheep, pointed at and despised, are dearer to God's heart, and perhaps fairer in His eyes than we who thank Him for not having made us like them.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### NIPPED IN THE BUD.

Ned Higgins remained at his Overbeck home the next day and the next; he feared to meet Babbie.

Dominick Kennelly made good use of Higgins' absence. He harangued the strikers in his crude, yet attractive way, and excited their easily inflamed passions. Like all men used to daily labor, they wanted to keep on the move, wanted to be up and doing, and they found time hanging heavy on their hands.

Babbie Conway, ever vigilant, ever daring, had kept out of Kennelly's way, but was well informed of what he was doing.

With the help of Mrs. Sharp, she saved three Polanders from a beating. The trio had tried their hand at "scabbing," and were going to their homes at Rockton, when they encountered an ambush of strikers. The terrified Poles fled, shrieking and cursing, as stone after



stone struck their heads and shoulders. Bleeding and exhausted, they ran into Conway's garden. Babbie, moved to sympathy by their plight, secreted one in a bake-oven, and another on the loft of the stable. Mrs. Sharp guided the third through a labyrinth of coal banks, and hid him in her cellar.

"Dear Lord!" exclaimed Hannah, "here comes the big mob! Maybe they will find the Poles, Babbie, an' if they do, nothing won't save them, and Kennelly will do something to you."

"It won't be my fault if they find them," was the answer.

Babbie rushed from her bedroom window, down the stairs, and into the garden. She met a burly striker at the gate, and bewitched him with a smile. She knew the power of her beauty.

"Where's them damn Huns?" was his inquiry.

"Gone out the road, like streaks of lightning. They are making for the mountain. No doubt, they are trying to get to Fairview."

He shouted out the information to those nearest him, and the rumor went



through the crowd. Up the road raced the heated mob, the dust blinding and choking them, and settling on their sweating foreheads.

Babbie danced a jig in the kitchen for Hannah's benefit.

"Now," she said, "to get the poor Poles away. I'll warrant you they won't play strike-breaker again; they are frightened out of their wits."

She carried two tubs into the kitchen, and threw on a chair a couple of towels. Then she called the quaking foreigners.

"Wash youself—quick. Me get clean clothes for you," she said, adopting the dialect used by the Poles. "Nobody know for you when you for dressed up nice."

Even in this act of charity, Babbie's fun-loving nature had full play. She ran to some trustworthy neighbors, explained the situation, and returned with a roll of clothes.

One of the men was tall, the other short. The tall one was given a pair of trousers that ended three inches above his shoetops. A high silk hat that old Jack McLain had bequeathed to his



boarding mistress for her bill, and which had a band of crape around it, was presented to the chunky Pole.

"You for look sad," said Babbie, "and everybody tink you wife she die."

He nodded solemnly, and the hat shook back and forth, for it was resting on his ears.

But the three Poles reached home safely, and were enthusiastically greeted by their wives and numerous progeny. The wives blessed the two women who had saved for them the fathers of their babies, and solemnly averred that they would live on huckleberries rather than that their husbands should incur such danger again.

That was Dominick Kennelly's work for the first day of Higgins' absence.

Again the devil, through his human agent, found employment for the idle hands and idle brains of the strikers. An attack on the deputies, or strike-breakers, was planned. That was Kennelly's work for the second day of Higgins' absence.

Hannah and Babbie Conway were in the kitchen; Hannah looking into a pot on the stove, Babbie looking into the mirror.



Hannah saw swollen, boiling beans dancing and flinging themselves about in a kind of miniature Charybdis, while a piece of pork spluttered and grumbled like an overfed Hollander. The sweating, panting beans had quite a jolly time with the meat—dodging and ducking about the lump, as if it were a maypole, and they gay queens of the meadow.

Babbie saw a face that made her gurgle with laughter—a face whose features and expression were changing every second. Now the face was as long as a cucumber, and had no forehead, and the eyes were nowhere. Now there was a terrific brow, almond eyes, and a chin which seemed to have usurped the place of the nose. Now the nose looked like a small streak of forked lightning.

The mystery explained—the mirror was an extremely cheap one, having waves in the crystal; and Peter Conway, while trying to comb a straight part in his hair, had knocked down the looking-glass, and to its many defects, added a crack.

Hannah closed the pot, whose lid presently sang a quaint little song of its



own, and Babbie, with a parting smile at the distorted countenance in the mirror, turned away.

The sisters fell to serious conversation.

"There certainly will be murder," said Babbie. "The scabs are curs every one of them, but murder is an awful thing. Life is God's gift, and it is not for man wantonly to take away. Besides, it may not be the scabs who will die, but our own men. The innocent may suffer more than the guilty.

"Something ought to be done to avert the crash, and done at once. Our Farringdon men expect the Montgomery and Mine Run miners, and a lot of Huns and Poles from Rockton. If once those foreigners get started, nothing on God's earth will prevent murder.

"And Dominick Kennelly's speeches are the cause of all the trouble. He'll kill somebody one of these days, and there will be a piece of rare fruit, bad, rotten fruit, hanging from the gallows-tree at the county prison, and tainting the air. This would-be leader of men will wear a garland yet, but the gar-



land will be of hemp, and will not be around his head, but around his neck."

"His poor wife, poor Meg!" sighed Hannah. "And it's the cursed drink that is his undoing. Why, he kin hold more whiskey nor a barrel. If he was only like Ned Higgins!" she added ingenuously.

"Do you know, Hannah," Babbie wheeled around, "I always think of heaven and hell, each fighting against the other, when I see Higgins and Kennelly. The men here will follow either of them. What a pity Ned can't talk in that catchy way of Kennelly's!

"Higgins takes no warmer cup than your coffee, while with Kennelly, life is alternately a fit of crazy drunken joy, and then a spell of sour stomach and dejection. Oh, the seductive poison of misused liquor. I read a story about a witch who transformed men into swine by giving them a drink at her table. That witch should have been named whiskey."

Babbie went to the open window, and looked out at the washery, on a peak of which were perched three or four ribald



crows, preening their feathers, as if they scented blood and slaughter, and were waiting impatiently.

Clouds upon clouds of steam were sailing in the air, about the little colliery's roof, the floating steam giving the narrow black structure the appearance of a gigantic troll with snowy locks. There was the squeak of scraper lines, the whirr of wheels, and the faint notes of a man's whistle, sweet and low, in the distance.

Babbie's soft face hardened.

"If God wasn't so slow" said Hannah, "He would send down fire and brimstone to burn them low-lived dogs off the earth. To think of them, the scruff of the country, coming here to take the bread out of our mouths. The poor strikers! if they fight, they fill a jail; if they set still, they fill a grave."

"We have much to be thankful for, Hannah. We have not yet suffered want, and we have been able to help the more needy ones a little."

"Yes, we kin thank our poor Rose for that. She tells me Meg Kennelly's aunt, Maria Casey, helps her a good bit. It



is a blessing for her that some one helps her, for she would fare mighty thin, if she had to depend on her husband. That Dominick Kennelly ought to be tarred and feathered. To see his wife hungry and him out blowing his horn in the saloons, and telling what he could do if he would.

“In winter, Dominick drinks to drive the cold out of his heart, he says, and in summer, to keep him cool; but about the only thing the whisky does is put the divil into him.

“Poor thing, her married life ain’t been a picnic or a lawn party. Thumps and kicks she got during the honeymoon. He nearly skulled her a couple of time, such blows he give her on the head.

“Every pay night she heard the same old tune: ‘Out you go, Meg, stove and all.’ And out she did go.

“One time, in perfect divilment, while she was stiffening her bread in the trough, he lifted her up, and set her plump down into the dough. You know how little and thin she is, and he is like a bull. Another time she was



scraping the last bit of flour from out of the barrel,—God knows, many's the time she had to scrape,—and he takes her by the heels, and stood her on her head in the barrel. She was near a goner by the time a neighbor got her out.

“Her life ain't full of sunshine, for it's not once or twice that her shoulders have been purple from his fists. Once while he was in playful humor, he cracked a dozen of eggs on her head. ‘Read where eggs helped the growing of —hic!—hair,’ says he, aiming the twelfth egg at her skull. Sure, he makes her play bootjack, and take off his shoes.

“Only works when he feels like it, and you needn't think that's too often. Does nothing but lounge around the saloons all the time; talks a good deal, always sounding his own horn and blowing; and ready to grab up any free glasses of beer that happen to sail along.”

“Hannah!”

Babbie's cheeks lost their color.

“The men are gathering to make an



attack on the deputies. O God, guard pap! The deputies have ammunition, piles of it, and our men haven't. It is mad of the men. God help them! We can't blame them; they see hunger ahead. But it's suicide, it is rash suicide for the miners to attack the deputies."

There was a wild look in Babbie's black eyes. She rushed to the porch to get a clearer view.

Men, men, men; men coming with stones and clubs in their hands; men with axes and shovels; men, a few, with guns in their hands.

A girlish figure, with hair flowing, sped along the board-walk and through the gate. Oh, to be a man, then, an eloquent man, to pacify the seething passions of the mob!

"Babbie! Babbie, be careful!" shrieked Hannah in an agony of fear. "What can you do? Dominick Kennelly would choke you black."

"God deliver us! Babbie Conway has lost her head," commented Mrs. Kennelly, as she saw the girl's slender figure dart down the road. "Heavens, she runs like a goat."



A flock of guinea hens, like soured Dame Van Winkles, were scolding their shiftless Rip of a husband, and filling the air with their harsh, shrill voices. Over against the guinea fowls was camped an indolent army of geese, which ever and anon let out a contented squawk.

Geese and guineas were sent shrieking in indiscriminate rout; Babbie had dashed right through their headquarters. In her wake was a cloud of yellow dust, which flew over the fences, and angered the bumblebees tolling kisses from the ruby lips of their favorite flowers. The road hardly felt the fleet, flying touches of her feet.

Babbie forgot that her hair was unbound, and floating behind her like a black cloud; that her sleeves were rolled up, displaying her plump arms and dimpled elbows; that the neck of her dress was unbuttoned.

The priest's house stood at the foot of the mountain, almost half a mile from the Conway home. So quietly was the attack on the deputies planned that Father Brady, the ever watchful pastor, had got no inkling of it.



He had just closed his breviary, when he heard some one stumble and fall on the steps. He hurried out, expecting a hasty sick-call, and saw Babbie Conway rising to her feet. Her lovely face was aglow, her eyes like stars, her breath almost gone. Her dress was open at the throat, and her slender fingers fluttered nervously, as she modestly tried to button it.

"Who is sick, child? Why, you have almost killed yourself."

"An attack on the deputies!" she managed to gasp. "Murder—the miners—from Montgomery and—" her voice broke off.

"Sarah, see to Babbie Conway!" called Father Brady to the housekeeper; then he was gone.

Babbie looked after him, as his figure in his cassock, hurried down the dusty road.

"Please God that he may be in time," she murmured.

She sipped a few drops from a glass of water, as the house-keeper fanned her.

"Come, Sarah," she said, "let us pray



before the altar that there may be no loss of life."

The old woman and the girl entered the church—Moses on the hill, Joshua in the valley.

There had been no attack yet made upon the deputies. But they had heard the thunder of the approaching storm, and they trembled behind their stacks of ammunition. The washery was now as still as the grave, and not a man could be seen near it. The cowardly strike-breakers were peeping from the cars.

Dominick Kennelly was about to give the miners a signal for the charge; the crisis had come. At that very instant, an old priest, with snow-white hair, appeared on the coal bank. He had climbed up the side, and reached the summit before any one became aware of his presence. His quick eye took in the situation at a glance. He saw who the ringleader was—Dominick Kennelly. Kennelly was a bold man; no one had ever seen him show the white feather; but he feared a priest.

"Dominick! What's this? What's



this?" demanded Father Brady, approaching the abashed leader. "Now, I tell you once and for all—"

Dominick stayed to hear no more. He had been sidling to the edge of the bank, as the priest came nearer, and now with one mad rush, he went stumbling, running down its steep side. Splash! He fell headlong into the sulphur creek. Blinded with mud, his mouth full of dirty slime, he tore along the railroad, and was lost to view.

Father Brady tried to be dignified, but failed. He burst into a hearty laugh, that was echoed by the crowd.

The deputies were unmolested. The champion of the mob had fled. Down crashed the plan of attack; its chief pillar had a sand foundation.



## CHAPTER XV.

### AMONG THE COAL BANKS.

Babbie Conway—she was still known as Babbie Conway; no one ever thought of calling her Mrs. Miller, and she herself would not have permitted the name—Babbie Conway was wending her way through the coal banks.

A song trolled on her lip, and her eyes were bright, though there was such a weight in her passionate bosom. A rain-worn straw hat tilted up from her brow, and added to the dark beauty of her piquant face. She had a long, slender switch in her hand, and lashed her skirts carelessly, as she tripped along.

She came to a sudden halt; Dominick Kennelly was approaching from the opposite direction. He was intoxicated, his eyes and veins full of the liquid fire the cheap saloons furnished; and she shrank instinctively, as she thought of the insulting words she would soon hear. She, however, expected no more than an insult.

“Ain’t it good we meet?” he sneered,



putting his red face close, on which passion had plowed lines, and breathing upon her his disgusting breath. "I have a bone to pick with you, me young crow-bait. Who brought Father Brady on me? Who managed to git the newspaper fella off somehow? And I have me despicions that you lent them bloody Poles a hand. All that has come to a head now, and I am going to pay you back, damn you! pay you back with interest and to spare."

His closely cropped head was like a shoe brush. His short thick hands and stubby fingers twitched, as if they longed to kill. He was a picture of the beast unrestrained, every passion pampered.

Babbie look around helplessly at the towering banks. He could murder her here, and no one might hear her cries. He watched her every movement, but she was too quick for him.

She cut him across the eyes with her switch, tore herself loose from his clutching hand; than with the graceful leap of a mountain gazelle, she passed him, and sped along among the old timbers and huge pieces of slate and rock.

With a horrible imprecation, he follow-



ed her, the welt on his face standing out a line of blood. In his anger, his teeth sank into his lip, and the veins of his brow were like whipcords.

It was like a hare slipping from the very grasp of a pursuing hound whose open jaws were ever ready to seize. She might have beaten him in the race, for Babbie was fleet of foot, but she stepped on a ragged piece of sheet iron, slipped, fell.

Her persuer seized her by the throat, and lifted her to her knees. Her little body bent like a withe in his clutch. She grew cold all over, as she looked at his terrifying face, with its sinister sneer and frown.

She could hear the wild rush of the sulphur creek, which had been swollen by the rains of the day before. She had neared the railroad, and might have called for help. Kennelly's ear caught the roar of the stream.

"There's where you go, beauty," he hissed. "A crack from me fist on that little temple, then a fling into the water, and you won't do no more divilment. When you're fished out of that dirty, black



mess, your face and them owl's eyes won't do any more mischiefs. Like as not, you won't have no face at all. Them devils of red lips won't smile no more, and set men after you. You will die like a rat, and when you're found, maybe that won't be for a month, you won't be no prettier than a rat."

He was spitting those words down into her face, as he dragged her along.

Along over old splintered boards and worn-out pulleys; through heaps of rusted iron, chute pans, broken cog wheels, scraper buckets, and chains; over coils of rope, over big lumps and piles of coal. Along the hard ground, her thin calico dress tearing in slits; nearer and nearer to the fatal stream.

Her face was upturned to the glorious heavens, where the sun floated in midday splendor amid golden-fringed, marble clouds. She closed her eyes, and tried to think of eternity and her Creator.

Dear God, must she die now? With what strength she had remaining, she tore his hands from her bruised throat, and screamed piercingly. Kennelly clenched his fist to strike her, when a man's voice stopped him.



A sound of footsteps flying across the swinging plank that served as a bridge, a crackle of coal dirt. Then Kennelly was stretched out on the ground by a well directed blow in the jaw, and lay there.

Ned Higgins turned to lift Babbie, but she was already on her feet, adjusting her hat, and pushing back from her white forehead her heavy hair.

"I am all right," she said.

He turned back furiously upon Kennelly whom he lifted, and punched three or four times in the face, each time bringing blood. He tossed the huge body around, as a dog would a mouse. Then he wiped his hands on his pocket handkerchief, and turned tenderly to Babbie; while Kennelly groaned, and pressed his hands to his face; the right to his swollen lips and bleeding teeth, the left to his black-and-blue cheekbones.

"What was wrong?" he demanded.

"A friendly quarrel," she said, with the piteous ghost of a smile. "And the weaker party went down. I caused the trouble myself."

Kennelly, who was near enough to listen, and who was now even afraid to



curse, looked with surprise at her.

"Don't make light of this," said Higgins, severely. "He was choking you. Say the word, and I will flay him alive. I would like to yank him over to that bridge plank, pitch him across it, wear out that board on him, give him the best thrashing of his life, and then fire him into the creek."

"Kennelly came to—to apologize to me for things he said, and I, being in bad humor, wouldn't give him the chance. I aroused the very devil in him. I shouldn't have talked so to a half-drunken man, and to stop my rapid tongue, the man simply had to choke me. But thanks to you, Ned—Mr. Higgins. Let Kennelly go this once, and he and—and—and I promise to be good next—next time."

With an attempt to skip, she went through the heaps of refuse, though her face was like death, and she was trembling.

But Higgins saw beneath the mask of her gayety, and knew she was suffering. All his passionate love aroused, he stepped towards her. Just in time; with a little sigh, she fell fainting into his arms, and her dark head lay on his breast.



Kennelly looked unutterable things after Higgins, as he carried her home.

"Well, I seen gamers before, but of all the gamers I ever seen, she beats the divil. Game she is from her little black head to her toe. Didn't squeal when a word from her would a kilt me, and she knowed it. The curse of the divil on them hard knuckles of his. He gave me me fill, there's no doubting.

"Well, Babbie, me brazen little tom-boy, me dashing young widdy, maybe you ain't so black as you're painted. Maybe there is a bit more good in you than we knew. You did me one good turn anyhow; it was a good turn; and—yes, I'll pay you back in kind, if ever I get the chance, and if I have to get in the snakes to do it. Now, if she only won't tell, but I don't think she will, seeing the way she has treated me."

No one, save Hannah, ever learned how close Babbie had been to a cruel death.

Kennelly never again could look his victim in the face, but in his heart, he had the greatest admiration for her, and sounded her praises on all occasions, in season and out of season.



Meg, his wife, wondered and rejoiced at her husband's change of heart, for she knew that he had detested Babbie Conway, and feared that he might do the girl mischief.



## CHAPTER XVI

### JACOB AND THE DAUGHTERS OF LABAN.

Over a week had gone by, tortoise-like, heavy and slow.

Higgins found his heart hungering for another sight of Babbie. It had been heaven to hold her in his arms for the brief time of her unconsciousness. It had been heaven to feel her little heart beating so close to his, to see her flower-like face so near his own. How helpless she was then, how weak and childish, and he so strong! Yet the very touch of her fingers had sent the blood bounding in mad leaps to his brain.

It was Sunday morning, and all nature seemed at peace. The sky was clear with scarcely a cloud; the grass still wet with dew, the sun just rising. The birds winged their way from tree to tree, trilling, caroling, chattering, chirping, till they awoke the echoes of the woods with their melody.



Higgins had been at Farringdon, and was now slowly sauntering along the railroad in the direction of Montgomery. He raised his eyes suddenly, and saw coming down the railroad toward him the very object of his thoughts.

She had stayed overnight with friends at Montgomery; and now was hurrying home, her eyes bright with the fresh air, her cheeks like twin roses, her lips barely parted, between which shone her strong little white teeth. She saw him; he quickened his steps, she halted.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I kin walk home with you; the road is lonesome."

In Higgins' voice, though he spoke dialect, there was a something that won Babbie more than could the softly modulated, well cultivated voice and nicely rounded periods of Asa Robinson, the rhetorical writer.

Babbie chattered on, as she skimmed over the ties, chattered on deliriously. Never was she nearer losing her self-possession; and to lose that, she knew, meant ruin to herself and to Hannah's hopes.

Young love by her side, so warm, so



strong, so near; her sense of duty and her sisterly affection, cold and forbidding, so far off; an earthly lover so close, holding in his power all that could make for her life worth the living; God so distant, with the far-away promise of eternal beatitude, for the renouncing of a thousand actual joys; heaven and its riches so far above; the cold, hard world all round about, with its need of love and tender care—the temptation was a fearful one.

Oh, to die of hunger on the heights which commanded fruitful fields! She had only to take a few steps, and the tempting delights were hers; but she must never leave her pure mountain summit; she should find not food for her life, but remorse, which like carrion, would taint all; she should put to her lips Dead Sea apples to embitter her existence.

She must slake her human thirst in her sister's happiness. It was her duty to do the heroic, to become from a reed yielding to each and every whim, a pillar of constancy and courage, to put away with her own hand the golden grain of joy, and feed her heart on dry, hard husks.



A mist came into her eyes, and shut out the eastern horizon, but it was not a mist caused by the intensely bright morning.

Babbie knew her own weakness, and for a moment the mad thought of flight from Higgins presented itself, but in a moment was banished. That would be ridiculous, and he would undoubtedly pursue her. Her only refuge was her tongue. She must let him speak as little as possible.

Rapid, light, frothy conversation would throw an invisible armor around her; would be a charm to ward off the betrayal of her secret love; would keep from her the wiles and weapons of passion — passion which a quivering lip or an unguarded eye might reveal.

Yet through it all, she felt like a Crusoe marooned on an islet, with the stormy waves maliciously licking away the ground round about, and rising slowly, but surely to engulf him; like a man journeying along a dangerous path, where a wild beast might at any moment attack him, or he might tread upon a serpent; like an escaped convict, who feared that his stolen



cloak might be flung open by the wind, and reveal his prison garment.

To be with Higgins was for her to toy with edge tools, to toss a rope playfully which might be converted into her halter.

Higgins was no fool. Her treacherous nature might act Judas, and reveal what she would die to keep hidden. A telltale flush in her cheek he might construe into the dawn of a rosy future for him. While her lips were driving him away from her, her eyes might plead with him to stay.

Higgins' conversation—for he spoke too—thus far had been treading on ground dangerous for them both. Once or twice, he came perilously nigh to a quicksand.

"I have been speaking to Hannah about the things you said to me that night," he persisted, "and she said that you had told her you were going to say awful things to knock the nonsense out of me. Well, you did say them. You took a way that no other woman on God's earth would take, but, then, you ain't like no other woman. You are a kind of bird that flies all alone.



"But you lied to me that night. She says you did, your dad says you did, I say you did; fer you cud have married the newspaper man if you wanted to, and gone away, and been rich and gay, but you wouldn't do it.

"That night when I run out of your house, like a lunatic, I went up on the mountain side, and wandered around till near daybreak. I turned over and over in me own mind the whole affair, and I saw how it couldn't be true, what you said of yourself.

"Then as if a message from heaven, I heard your voice floating down on the breeze. I could have sworn it was your voice, crying and moaning, only I knew that was impossible; that I was only imagining. But that sound was like a message from heaven, and all me doubt of you died."

Babbie had grown pale. She feared he might have seen her on the mountain that never-to-be-forgotten night. She tried to speak, but he did not wait.

"It was hard and cruel and mean of you to say such things," he went on. "They stuck in me at first like all them



bow-arrows in that picture of St. Sebastian in church. It was like taking the statue of a saint from off the altar, and daubing mud all over it, and throwing stones at it.

"But one thing is sure; you don't care a row of pins for me, else you wouldn't talk like that to a man you thought anything of. I guess you stuck me and Robinson in the same box—two jacks. I kin pity him now, looking back. I hope you don't remember the ugly, nasty way I talked to you that night. I am mighty sorry fer it, as this shows, fer this is my third apology."

"The only thing I remember, or care to remember, of that night," said Babbie, "is the great fun I had in dressing up the newspaper chap as a woman, and in landing Hannah's delicious custard on Kennelly's face. I scream yet when I think of how Dominick looked with bits egg all over his sufficiently ugly countenance. I feel as grateful to those two men as I should feel to comedians who furnished me with a pleasant quarter of an hour."

Higgins was piqued; she had forgotten



all about his jealousy; had put it and him from her mind as something of not even trifling importance. Yet he smiled, as he looked down at this vivacious little minx, though the forehead over those smiling lips was grave and thoughtful.

"You made a fool of Robinson, I believe," said Higgins. "Love means nothing to you."

He looked at her with the eager, pleading look a hungry dog gives a bone.

"Love!" she laughed, lightly. "You remember that little show which was given for the benefit of our church? The play itself was not so very bad, but the little song squalled by Mrs. Sharp's niece between the acts was a sorry piece of music. Love to me is like that song, and has no more bearing on my life than that miserable ballad had on the drama."

He never knew how hard it was for her to smile just then, as if for her the world was an Arcadian summer.

Farringdon's southern housetops were now in sight. She experienced relief that the end of this journey was nigh. It was as when the darkness of night in which assassins worked, is fading, and the meek, dove-like dawn is shedding security upon your infested hold.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE SEAL BROKEN.

They at length rounded the curve of the mountain, and a train rumbled behind them. There were two railroad tracks, an old and a new, of which the new had not yet been used.

"Come to the new road," she said, "no trains have yet been run on it, the train coming must be on the old."

Babbie was now babbling away like a frivolous brook, talking of everything and nothing, while Higgins earnestly listened to her.

Both were oblivious of their surroundings, when suddenly with a roar, the train came bursting into view around the curve—the first to be run on the new track!

The engine was upon the couple almost before they knew it. Higgins caught Babbie in his arms. It was too late to escape.

He looked into her eyes, but there was no terror there; only love, a woman's



love. The passion which was stamped upon and only smoldering in her bosom, had burst from its fragile keeps, and was blazing in intense lustre. Like lightning, the truth broke upon him, the sweet truth that he alone had full possession of her young heart.

"May God have mercy on us both!" he heard her whisper, as she flung her arms about his neck, and hid her face on his breast.

The train struck him and hurled him, with Babbie in his arms, down the clayey embankment into the oozy yellow slime at its foot. She escaped with a few bruises, but he was unconscious.

She extricated herself from his arms. Trembling with fear and love, she opened his shirt at the throat, and steeping her handkerchief in the water of a little stream that was near, she bathed his temples until he regained consciousness.

When Higgins saw light again, the heavens he gazed at were Babbie's anxious eyes, eyes still bright with love's golden flame. He arose and shook himself. She was all solicitude. He was dazed for a moment, then all the past





H.S. Brunner

SHE BATHED HIS TEMPLES.







quarter of an hour came back to him.

"Babbie, Babbie, you are safe?"

He drew her to him. He was bruised and cut, and was bleeding from a small wound in the back of his head, but he was happy. Babbie tore herself from his arms. She was entirely unnerved.

"Your secret came out, love of my life," he said tenderly. "All that put-on to make me think you light-minded and unfit to be a man's wife, is gone like smoke. No selfishness in you, Babbie. We must marry. Life would be heaven for me, and I would try to make it heaven for you."

"There is Hannah," she answered.

He heard the pained quiver in her voice. He did not look at her eyes; he knew they were full of tears.

An interval of silence. The leaves were rustling with a sound so merry that it irritated him; a daisy at his feet looked up into his troubled countenance with so bright and cheerful a gaze that he put his heel on its gold-crowned head; the laurels waved their green branches derisively in his direction; the low-toned stream sang gayly to the whispering



winds. One sportive little silver cloud had galloped too far from his fleecy brethren, and the lambkin was scurrying across the heavens to rejoin his flock.

He glanced at Babbie. The undertint, a delicate pink like that inside of a seashell, had gone from her cheeks. Hers was now a beauty without glow or glory, as if the sunshine had departed from a fair field.

Her little figure was trembling. He could not stand that. In an instant his arms were about her, and he had pressed her to him.

He feasted his large blue eyes on her face. He gazed down into the black depths of her eyes—deep down, he felt that he could never fathom those depths, any more than he could fathom the depths of her noble heart.

His glance took in her low seamless brow, from which her dark hair waved back; her little retrousse nose, her tempting red-cherry lips, the bewitching dimple in her ivory chin.

Breaking from his embrace, she fled down a narrow path, her disheveled black hair falling, like a silken avalanche, over her shoulders.



"O God, God of mercy!" he heard her moan, "take away the curse that is on me. I am ill-starred. Mrs. Kelly made no mistake when she said I was. Mam in heaven, I wish I were with you."

Like a bird, she winged her way through the brush, through the laurels, through thorns and briers that tore her white skirt; sank to her ankles in the slimy mud, splashed through the shallow brook, leaped lightly over a moss-covered log, sped through the daisy-embroidered grass.

She paused near a small pond which seemed to take down the cloud-specked heaven into its heart.

There was a thick clump of trees and bushes near the pond, and a wild chicken-grape vine climbed among the branches of the tall bushes, and hung to the limbs of the trees.

The mining-boys had hollowed out this thicket, lopping off the lower branches, and so forming a kind of grotto upon which Calypso herself might not have frowned. In this grotto—it extended for yards and yards—the men and boys would spend many of their



leisure hours. There they would lie, some on the broad of their backs, some on their sides, spinning yarns and cracking jokes at one another's expense, while the leaves overhead warded off the broiling sun.

Babbie was glad to find the place deserted, and as still as if silence sat there to listen to the breezes. Through the interwoven branches and foliage overhead which formed the dome of a Druidic temple not made with hands, she looked at the far-away blue serene of the morning sky.

She walked to the water's edge, and gazed down through the crystal at a trio of brilliant spotted lizards, and a crab that was making quite a fool of himself in the mud. How fair and glorious was nature just then and there!

Back into the grotto she glided, looking like a beautiful Ariadne with her unbound tresses.

Over the face of an age-lined rock hung tendrils of youthful ivy, like silky strands of hair trying to make young a hard old countenance. Down in the grass at the foot of the rock she sank,



down on the earth, strewn with dew-drops, like orient pearls.

One long sob floated through the grotto, out over the water's silvery surface, and died away.

Until Babbie vanished, Higgins watched her; his eyes seeming to stand in his head, his jaws set firm, the skin drawn like parchment.

He felt as if the tomb had closed on his love, and no angel's hand could ever roll back the stone. He groaned with exquisite misery; and at the sound, the stream of water, a few yards off, whimpered pityingly among the sedges, while the high-elbowed grasshoppers ceased for a second their merry dancing.

Then the train men came upon him.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### IN THE EXTERNAL AND THE INTERNAL FORUM.

"Pap," said Babbie, as he and she sat at the breakfast table, while Hannah was at the bake-oven, "I must go away. I can't stay home now."

The old man choked.

"Don't fear, I shall not turn out bad; won't go to the dogs, body and soul, as every one is foretelling, even though I am far from your protecting arms. Besides, in the city Rose can watch me; and then some day in the future, your dove and raven will fly back to you; the dove as soon as the strike is over; the raven as soon as Hannah is married, and has her own house.

"Pap," tears were in his eyes, "I have learned a lesson. Though I can't be anything but what I am, still I have too much of my dead and gone mother in me ever to go very far astray—that mother whom I never saw. Your honor is as white as your hair, daddy dear, and Babbie will



never put a blemish on that honor. Conrad Miller placed a wedding-ring on my finger, when our train stopped at Philadelphia."

"You look like your mother, dear," replied the old man, with brimming eyes. "And I am not crying because I think you will bring disgrace on me; no, I hate to let you go from me."

"It is the only way."

"But he has not married Hannah yet. You kin keep out of his road as much as possible. When he marries, then—but stay home now."

He looked keenly at her from under his bushy eyebrows. Babbie's countenance had betrayed her.

"Child, child, tell your old dad; have no secret from him; do you care for Ned Higgins?"

"Pap!" Agony wrung the secret from her. "I love Ned Higgins so well that I believe if he should lay his hand on me, cold and dead, my still pulses would awake, and come to life again. I love him as mam must have loved you. That is why I go away."

She was like a poor prisoner holding



her death-warrant. The hand she laid on her father's was as heavy as a lump of lead.

"But he shall make Hannah his wife. 'Twould be like stripping the dead to take her wedding-ring from her. No, no, I cannot warm my cold heart in Hannah's lifeblood."

Babbie went to the window, and looked over the hollyhocks and blue and white phlox at Hannah, who was standing, like a female Laocoön, among a string of stockings which flew from the clothes' line. Her father followed Babbie.

A slow, heavy bumblebee was buzzing in the calyx of a hollyhock, and a humming bird, like a flash of light, was quivering from flower to flower. The blue phlox seemed to be destitute of food, for the humming bird, in a perfect fury, was tearing one of the blossoms to pieces.

"How selfish is that little bird!" said Babbie softly. "Just like me. I am a kind of queen bee—or better, a drone, set upon a throne of wax and fed, while Hannah is that poor hard-working buzzer out there."

Hannah at this juncture entered.



Her hair was twisted up in curl-papers, the front of her head done up in small rolls. Hannah's frizzes were her only vanity. Now the strands of hair were twined about the bits of paper so tightly that the skin of her forehead was drawn taut, and the veins on her temples stood out plainly. Even to look at her in that plight made one's head ache, and brought vividly to mind the tortures of the early martyrs. Hannah, to complete her coiffure, had made use of half the front sheet of the local paper. On one little knob of hair appeared the word STRIKE— as if Hannah was the walking shibboleth of the strikers. Babbie laughed, and her father, puzzled, looked at her. This strange child of his was ready for laughter at any moment.

Saturday night saw Babbie Conway enter Father Brady's confessional.

The women outside wondered why she stayed so long. They could hear her sobbing, and the priest speaking softly to her. Mrs. Dormer winked slyly at old Mrs. Kelly, and whispered in a shrill voice which could be heard for yards, and sounded as if it came from a split reed:



“He’s laying it into her; she’s a bad one. Good for her we have sich a priest.”

Father Brady’s heart was pouring forth a flood of sympathy into the poor young beaten tempted soul. And this penitent was the bold brazen girl who was the talk of the parish!

Alas, how ready we are with our judgments! Sinless ourselves, forsooth, how prompt we are to cast the stone!

The vileness in our own hearts causes us to pass unmerciful sentence on our delinquent neighbor; to give him credit for no better intention than our purblind eyes can see in his work; to construe his action as unfavorably as possible.

It cannot be, to our thinking, that under the indifferent or seemingly bad surface, there may be a hidden good. Faults are more readily seen than virtues; our eyes look at the exterior only.

In a thousand places, deserted and thorn-choked to the eyes of men, there are blooming, modest and lovely, the violets of secret goodness and virtues. We forget that pearl seekers find their jewels in coarse, homely shells.



More often wrong than right, we go on blundering in our judgments; quite consistent, but quite incapable of learning; experience has taught us nothing.

Sad news awaited Babbie on her return from the church. Hannah sat weeping, with Mrs. Sharp by her side, Mrs. Sharp's face being a very "title-page of tribulation."

Babbie was cheerful; about her there was an air of sunset calm; the consciousness of her confession's integrity and the heart-soothing words of the confessor were balm to her soul. A sentence of the revered priest's was in her memory:

"God never calls his faithful children into the gloom of Gethsemane without having first stationed close at hand some strengthening angel."

"Oh, oh!" wailed Mrs. Sharp, with that sort of temporary importance which a bearer of bad news feels herself to have. "Your pap has been took by them blasted scabs. Oh, oh! Dominick Kennelly and some of them boys wrecked a car of victuals going to them, the dogs, and like the cowards every man



of them is, they were afeared to tackle the young lads, so what did they do but grab your poor pap as he was walking near, as innocent as a babe unborn, afterwards. Oh, oh!"

"And where is pap now?"

"Up at Overbeck, I hear. The scabs have him in their cars, and on Monday are going to take him to jail. Oh, he'll get years. He'll die in jail, for he's too old and weak to stand the disgrace and it will kill him. Oh, oh! The rich man Dives"—pronounced as a monosyllable—"kin always prosecute to death the poor beggar Lazarus, who had to lay with the dogs that were full of sores, and were glad to eat the crumbs the big-bellied glutton let fall. Oh, oh!"

Mrs. Sharp rocked to and fro.

Babbie, with a groan, staggered against the wall.

She had meant to be brave, very brave for the time to come; to be a veritable Judith at heart; to put Higgins once and for all out of her life, and to live for her father only.

Now she felt her power, physical and moral, ebbing from her; her burden in-



creasing in inverse ratio to her strength. Was her old father, her shield, to be snatched away from her, the palladium of her life, the talisman to keep off temptation?

She was like a wounded Penthesilea, and her sorrows, like cowardly foes, piled upon her, as her heart got weak, and her blood departed; one woe was treading upon another's heel. This was her sorrow's crown of sorrow.

The sisters slept little that dreary Saturday night, and were up with the dawn.

Babbie's heart had a faint hope hidden away in it, but that hope she must not speak of to the dear, sorrowing one beside her. Her purpose was a mad one, but succeed it must and should. She would not permit herself to think of failure. The soul of Antigone shone in Babbie's eyes.

Hannah was too grief-stricken to notice her sister's abstraction.

Silently they sat at the open window of their bedroom, the fresh morning air, burdened with fragrant incense, blowing on their faces, and streams of gold flowing over the eastern hills—hills suffused with



blushes under the radiant, piercing eye of the sun.

The flowers were breaking their alabaster boxes of ointment to anoint the feet of their lord. A band of tiny insects were swallowing the sunbeams, and weaving and unweaving the mazes of their fantastic dance, to the music of their own slender flutes. The morning mists, like so many modest fairies, were slowly, gracefully gathering their cobweb robes about their long, slender forms, and were trailing away — away from the creek and the coal banks, away from the meadows and the homes. The birds, jewels on fire with music, had burst spontaneously into a Sabbath hymn of praise.

All the world seemed one great song on that Sunday morn; but the sisters had no part in the jubilee.

Little Jackine Sharp and Babbie had always been friends, for many a penny she gave him. He served her well now.

“Jackine,” she whispered, pressing a two-dollar bill into his hand, “are you a coward?”

“Not on your life,” replied the stalwart little chap, expanding his chest and stretch-



ing himself to his full height, "no more nor me dad is."

"Well, spend every cent of this for cigarettes at Mrs. Kelly's. Go in the back way for her shop is locked on Sundays, you know. Then—but you are not afraid, are you?"

He gave her a reproachful look.

"Then go to the scabs at Overbeck and sell the cigarettes to them. Keep twenty-five cents of the money you make, and, O Jackine," she put her arms around him, "don't come back without some news of pap; Hannah and I shall die if you do."

"Jackine Sharp ain't no slouch," he said, with the air of a crusader. "You kin depend on him."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE BATTLE OF THE AMAZONS.

Mrs. Kelly had some interesting gossip for Mrs. Dormer that fair Sunday afternoon.

"Good Lord," said the vinegar-visaged storekeeper, "Babbie Conway must be fast going to nothing. Why, she sent Sharp's little boy here to buy her cigarettes. I wormed it out of him. I told him he couldn't have them, 'less he told me who wanted them. And how many, God save the mark! but two dollars' worth."

Mrs. Kelly's voice raised in a scream.

"I knew no good would come out of her," rejoined Mrs. Dormer. "If my girls were like her, I'd smash 'em."

"Well," said Mrs. Kelly, "fer once in me life, I am going to do a good turn. I intend here and now to go up to Hannah Conway, and tell her of the high jinks her sister is cutting up. Smoking cigarettes, and poor people's children starving for the want of bread."

"Faith, I'll be with you," returned Mrs. Dormer, with alacrity.



In a brief time, they were in the Conway parlor.

Mrs. Kelly, whose skirts were wet, having draggled through a muddy ditch, swish-swashed to a rocker, and ensconced herself in it. With a slight lisp, for she had broken her sole remaining front tooth, she told her tale in the sad tone of a young inexperienced preacher descending on the Prodigal Son or the Magdalene.

"Babbie did not; she does not smoke," declared Hannah Conway, indignantly. "It is a base, foul lie. Babbie would not spend money that way when money is scarcer than hen's teeth. I tell you she does not smoke."

"Call me a liar, do!" screamed Mrs. Kelly, just as Babbie entered the parlor. "Do you deny," she demanded of Babbie, "kin you deny, that you bought two dollars' worth of cigarettes to-day, —this Lord's blessed Sunday?"

"You women here?" responded Babbie, coldly. "Job's comforters, leave this house."

"With the greatest of pleasures," there was iron in Mrs. Kelly's smile, "fer your



presence is like carrion; it perlutes the air."

"O miserable harpies, these black old coal regions are only the blacker, for having such foul birds of ill omen here. Scandal is your delight. What matters it to you that you are feeding on human hearts and souls?"

"Babbie Conway, 'tis yourself kin talk," chimed in Mrs. Dormer. "You have given us plenty of scandal to chat about, and we are ever so much obliged to you. I guess the Lord is afflicting your saintly old father fer your sins. The sins of the fathers is visited on the heads of the children, but in this case, things are reversed and turned; the father suffers fer the child."

"Sins of the fathers," retorted Babbie. "It's a blessing that the sins of the mothers don't come down, else I would tremble for your babies."

Mrs. Kelly made an effort to speak, but Mrs. Dormer was too quick for her, and much against her will, Mrs. Kelly was forced to play the role of listener.

"Don't try to stop her, Mrs. Kelly," said Mrs. Dormer, smiling an iron smile.



"Let her go on. We can't keep step with herself that has book-larning and eddecation. She talks like an alarm clock. You might as well try to attempt to hold a wagon that has started to run away down hill. But, thanks be to God! the saints were not eddecated, and the devil never yet made use of a numbskull."

"You women," continued Babbie, "remind me of ravens waiting beside a dying sheep to begin their foul banquet. Like hyenas, you drag from their graves the very bones of the dead, and feed on the reputation that is forgotton. You are all eyes, all ears, all tongue. The bite of the gnat, the sting of the wasp, the blow of the serpent—that is your conversation."

"Sure," said Mrs. Kelly, with a grimace, "it keeps me one poor tongue working over time to tell all me two eyes sees in you."

Hannah sprang to her feet in anger.

"Go out of this house," she cried; "don't make light of my mourning and my little sister's. We're alone to-day; there is only the two of us girls here, her and me, and you might remember we are



motherless, you that are mothers yourselves, and have daughters of your own. Isn't it bad enough that we should lose our father, the best friend we have on earth—the one who took God's place for us, without you taunting us?"

"Hannah, I'm sorry for you," said Mrs. Dormer, "but," with a frown at Babbie, "that one—"

"That one is trying to keep from throwing something at your head," Babbie broke in, "so you had better fly; I may yield to the temptation, and my aim is good. Rumor can't be very far astray when it says that your tongue tripped over your only tooth, while you were dishing out scandal, and broke off that pearl of great price. Old hen, it will be a relief to this village when you cease to kick up a dust, looking for a juicy worm of scandal, and you have gone to the everlasting roast-pan."

Mrs. Kelly had cautiously withdrawn to the porch, but through the open doorway, she cast back a Parthian shot.

"I guess your aim ought to be good," said she. "You had plenty of practice—on your dead husband."



Mrs. Kelly promptly vanished behind the big, spreading lilac tree, and the gate was heard to open. But Mrs. Dormer remained unrouted.

"I guess the happiest day Conrad Miller had was the day he died, and got away from you," she sneered. "Good-bye. I'll say an act of contrition as I go, fer there telling what you won't preject at me harmless head."

Her substantial form creaked down the steps.

That was Babbie's last draught of wordy vinegar from the hands of Mrs. Dormer.

"Babbie," said Hannah, "why did you put on that black dress? I thought you had laid it off fer good."

"I thought so, too, but to-day I was in such a mood that black seemed fitting. Cheer up, sister, daddy will get out of this scrape; his good name will help and save him."

"Oh, do you think so?"

"I know so."

"Babbie, those two women seem to hate you. Why, they told me that to-day Sharp's little boy bought two dol-



lars' worth of cigarettes fer you at Mrs. Kelly's store. They wanted me to believe even that."

"By accident, they sometimes tell the truth. I did get the cigarettes."

"You did!"

"Yes, and then I gave the boy twenty-five cents for himself. I want to get tidings from pap, so I have sent the little chap, who is pluck itself, to the quarters of the strike-breakers at Overbeck. He is selling the cigarettes, and trying to find out pap's location."

"Babbie, how wise you are! How people misjudge you!" Hannah put her arms about Babbie's neck and kissed her. "Old Mrs. Kelly has much to answer for when she slanders you, you with your heart of gold."

"Her slandering tongue pains me, pains me sometimes more than I care to say, but what pains me most are the eager, listening ears. Then when people give me too much room to pass!"

Never was an afternoon longer to Babbie. The golden day was fading and turning gray, but the hours seemed to loiter. She sat at her bedroom win-



dow, scanning the east, waiting, watching, fearing. Hannah and Ned Higgins were downstairs in the front room; he pouring out consolation, she drinking it in like a thirsty doe. Babbie had fled at his approach.

A dusty little boy in the distance, running and panting. Babbie flew to the gate and beckoned wildly.

"He's there! He's there!" the boy shouted. "They are six cars all in a row, and he is in the last one, the nearest to Overbeck. And, O Babbie, he's tied hand and foot. I don't think he got nothing to eat, for the men ain't working to-day, but are drinking, and some is drunk."

Babbie put her arms swiftly and silently about the child, and kissed him. He pressed a handful of loose change into her palm, but the money fell unheeded to the floor.

A moment before, she had been a perfect Mara of bitterness; now she was a beautiful Naomi, filled with expectation and hope. Her countenance was full of light, like the summer heavens when suddenly freed from the heavy veiling clouds of storm.



## CHAPTER XX.

### CORDELIA.

Hannah was sound asleep; Babbie made sure of that.

Why did she stoop and kiss the homely face? Why did she pass her hands in gentle, loving touches over the curl-papered head? She could not tell.

She got cold and nervous for a second, because the old house seemed to breathe farewell to her. "Good-bye! good-bye!" ticked out the rusty aged clock. Her mother's picture on the wall seemed to smile, oh, so sadly, and say, "Adieu, adieu!"

She paused for a second in the garden, for the grass under the clothes' line was stirring, and something white was moving toward her. Then she felt a velvety tongue lick her hand, and the neighbor's big white hound looked up at her. He whined piteously, and jumping up, laid his paws on her, as if he wished her to stay. His sad cry made her shudder. With a gentle "Go away,



King!" she pushed him from her, stealthily opened the gate, and whispered to her pet mule.

It was but the work of a minute to untie the vagrant old mule that she had tethered that evening to the tree behind the garden. Thank God! the night was of Stygian darkness; no moon, not a tiny star; the heavens seemed to have put on sackcloth.

Could she reach Overbeck before day-break? She must, she should.

Some Farringdon matrons peeped from their windows, as the old mule clattered by, but no eye noticed the little black figure crouching on his back, and whispering to him.

"It's a shame for him to be running loose," said Mrs. Dormer, bitterly; "but Babbie Conway has the poor beast as crazy as herself. The girl would have the lower regions upsot, if she was there. Sure, her mother in heaven would have gray hair, and turn in her grave, if she cud see her."

And Mrs. Dormer drew in from the window her face, which was shining, smooth, and expressionless, like a teakettle.



"Such a hole as this Farrington," said Mrs. Sharp, who had heard the noise, but could see nothing. "You might screw the eyes out of your head, and get no glimpse of anything, never a light in the town. Sure, if you fell in a ditch, and cracked your neck at night, no one would find you till morning. One would need to be an owl or a bat to live in Farrington at night."

Along the railroad went the mule and his fearless rider, over the cinders, the iron shoes striking sparks from a switch, and stumbling over the splintery ties, till the railroad was crossed by the turnpike.

Then Babbie followed the highway, the thick, heavy dust smothering the thud of the hoofs. Over the loosely-boarded old bridge, under which slumbered the sulphur creek, like a green snake.

She tore along the deserted road, skirted on either side by low huckleberry bushes, and shaded by tall pines and oaks, matted with the climbing wild grape and ivy parasites.

In the dense woods, a hound tongued after a bounding hare, and his deep voice echoed along the hills. Through the



trees, she guided on the mule, along a narrow path, where the low branches tore at her hair, and tried to pull her from her seat; through the forest, startling the birds in their nests; without a moment's pause, as if the brute felt what was in the maiden's heart, and sympathized with her.

Babbie was praying, not for herself—it didn't matter about her—but for her father; fervent little ejaculations which that well-loved father had taught her at his knee in the sweet years ago—prayers which ever since rose spontaneously to her lips in every moment of distress.

She saw faint lights in the distance. Nearer and nearer they came, larger and brighter. She peered ahead through the darkness, with the eager eyes of a shipwrecked mariner seeking a sail.

Over the brow of a little hill; through a lakelet in the road, left reluctantly at sundown by a trio of ducks, which had made of it a temporary pond. She was at Overbeck, and no sign of dawn.

She tied the mule to a tree, and stole quietly toward the enemy's camp. She



left the road, and walked where the grass and weeds were high and thick and rank. A thistle pierced her hand, and left some of its down upon her black skirt. With the skill of an Alpine climber, she picked her way among long, heavy pipes, choked with rust; among greasy, foul oil barrels.

She was close to a line of box cars. Her soul smiled in her breast, at the thought of her father so near, though her face was as sad as the grave.

There were lights in the boiler-house, which looked like a huge dragon hissing in its sleep, but that was some distance beyond the cars.

She had no weapon, save the small penknife in her hand, and she was almost in the midst of low, unscrupulous men, but her heart failed her not. On hands and knees she crawled over the railroad. She neared the last car, trembling, not with fear, but with anxiety. If he should not be there!

At that thought, a fit of trembling took her, and she fell flat upon her face. A moan was stifled and crushed on a railroad tie. To fail in her search would



almost kill her. She knew she would rend the skies with her disappointed screams.

She almost prayed God to work a miracle, to strike her enemies blind, or render her invisible, till her search was ended. Courage came to her, and she slid around the car.

"Pap!" she whispered through the open doorway. "Are you there?"

No answer but the hiss of the boiler-house, which seemed to gloat over her misery.

"Pap!"

She had climbed into the car.

"Here is Babbie. O pap, darling, speak to me!"

She heard a footstep outside the car, a man's; a light was coming closer. In an agony of dread, she sank down in a corner of the car, drew her black shawl over her head and face, and held her breath.

For a second, which seemed an age to Babbie, she heard the footsteps pause outside the car, and then through her thin shawl, she could see a light flash in at the open doorway. She pressed



her hand to her heart, as if to hush its loud beating.

How slow and leaden-footed the seconds were, as they dragged, dragged away, one by one, slower and slower—just like the old clock at midnight which, when she was sick, seemed to tick the more slowly, as if to reproach her for her impatient listening!

“Hum, the ole feller’s asleep,” said a coarse, liquor-fuddled voice.

Then the footsteps sounded farther away.

Like an arrow, Babbie darted to the other end of the car, and knelt by her father.

“Pap, pap, it’s Babbie.”

She was caressing and kissing his face. Now she had snipped with her little knife the cords that bound his hands and feet. She put her arm about him, and lifted him to a sitting posture. He stood up, but staggered, and would have fallen, only for her sustaining arm; he was very weak, and his limbs were stiff.

“Not a sound, pap; there is one of the men near.”

She peeped out and listened, but could



see no light, and could hear the footsteps no longer. She sprang lightly from the car. Her father was not slow to follow. Trembling and holding their breath, they groped their way through the darkness.

Every crackle of the ashes under their feet almost caused Babbie to shriek aloud, so great was the tension on her nerves. When she heard the mule moving around, she almost danced with glee. Her father was about to lift her to the faithful creature's back, when a light flashed near them, and Babbie saw a man come out of a small powder house.

"Get on the mule, pap," was her hoarse whisper, "and I'll climb up behind you."

The mule started away, with Babbie clinging to her father.

"Halt, or I'll shoot!" came the same liquor-fuddled voice.

"Goad the mule on, pap."

Babbie was glad to be between her father and the deputy. She raised her head that it might protect his.

Crack! A pistol shot. A little cry from the girl.

"Merciful God, child, did he hit you?"

"No, 'pap dearest, only frightened me.



Thank God, we are out of his reach now!"

Away sped the mule, his clumsy hoofs beating the old wooden bridge like cannon-balls, kicking up clouds of dust that blinded and choked his riders. Along the road, where the trees leaned lovingly down, and caressed with their cool leaves the hot faces of the father and daughter. On, on, farther and farther from Overbeck and the "scabs."

Peter Conway was out of danger now; he need fear no pursuit.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE ETERNAL SUNRISE.

The stars had unveiled themselves. Now they were growing dimmer, and the trees beginning to grow plainer. The morning sky was all tinted with pearly hues from the unrisen sun. The woods, like a mighty altar, were sending up to heaven clouds of incense from their bosom, while tiny birds, mere vocal sparks, sang and chirped the matin hymns. In the distance, the coal banks seemed a brotherhood of venerable monks making meditation.

Farringdon was near.

"Let us get off, and rest a little," said Babbie, in a tone of pain.

There were a spring and brook near the road, and the grass was like velvet. Wild flowers bloomed all about, and the air was heavy with the sweet morning dew.

Peter Conway leaped off the mule, and reached out his arms for Babbie. Not a moment too soon; her face was like



death, and she was falling. Her dark skirt was soaked with blood, and blood gushed from her bosom.

A mad burst of grief from the strong old father, like a lion that sees his little offspring dying from the hunter's wound. Gently he laid her on the velvety sward. No need for words from her lips; her face told him the truth. He lifted her to his bosom, when he realized her condition.

"O Babbie, don't luk that way," he sobbed; "your mam loked that way when she left me."

Open flew the lovely dark eyes, full of a new light now, full of a new beauty.

"Pap, oh, pap, I never thought it was so sweet to die; I never thought the gateway of death could be so beautiful, so much of a triumphal arch. I have been dying for the last ten minutes. I kept quiet till you were out of danger."

Years before a learned theologian who has left us weighty tomes, said those self-same words: "I never thought it was so sweet to die." Death lays us all on the same bed; there is no distinction when the great angel comes.



"It's for the best, pap."

She held his hands tightly with her poor chill little fingers, ah, so pitifully weak now.

"I am ill-starred; remember old Mrs. Kelly's words; I was born for misfortune. You remember that bad egg, pap, out of which came the diseased little pee-pee. That was Babbie. Pap, you have three daughters. Two of them will get married, and give you their husbands and children to love; the black sheep will die. Isn't God wise?"

"You haven't did much wrong. What you did do you have wiped out."

"Did I wash the sin away? Oh, I am glad—glad. Pap, I never was like the other girls, and then that marriage of mine. I was always a thorn in the flesh to you, though you wouldn't admit it. Everything went wrong, dear pap. It seemed I couldn't help my wildness; it was in me. Everywhere I planted, briars came up.

"And I am madly in love with Ned Higgins. You don't know what a struggle I had to give him up. I could resist him that night, but I am sure I



could not later. If he looked at me, my resolutions would be like wax before the fire. Pap, there was ever a devil in me as big as a bull. I never was one of the Oh-be-good sort of girls," she said, with a boy's frankness.

He smiled sadly, and stroked her hair. No word was spoken for several minutes.

The sun was rising on the world, putting out the stars with his ruddy hand, and shedding his glorious light through the trees afar off in the east; and here was the sun of this sad young life setting so rapidly.

Now a bright-winged little bird, God's tiny prophet, perched on the bough above, and poured forth a song full of wild, sweet melody. It was a fitting dirge for wild little Babbie. Perhaps the golden-voiced songster was recounting the epic of that brief life, his strains were poetic, as if he were trying to hide the terrible realism of it all.

"Pap"—how weak and hoarse her voice was! "I made a splendid confession on Saturday. I told the priest



every sin I had ever committed, and he was so kind. And the Holy Communion I received yesterday, the blessed memory of it clings to me still. Ask dear old Father Brady to read a Mass for me as soon as he can. Help me to say a good act of contrition, and oh, hold me tight; I am slipping away from you."

Peter Conway said something, but his voice was so broken with emotion that the words were lost to her ear—as if a strong, far-off bell on a mountain peak swung out its melody to a storm.

"Dad, yours must be the last face I see here, and mine shall be the first for you to see beyond the grave."

Her eyes smiled, though her lips did not; and like a lost, weary, storm-driven deer, she nestled to him.

The pitying death angel looked down into the black eyes, and there saw the holy smile; looked down into the depths of the soul, from which all earth stains had departed; he looked for a second, and that smile became fixed forevermore.



Louder and sweeter grew the song of the tiny bird; he seemed to be singing his little life out. Everything was hushed but his song and the music of the brook. Now he spread his wings and vanished, but his song floated behind him like a thread of purest gold.

“That bird was her soul,” murmured the father, kissing the irresponsive lips, and then falling on the grass by the white, beautiful face.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE PROPHET IS WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY.

More than one eye was wet, as the account of the heroic little mine girl's death was read. The writer had brought sympathy to the very end of his pen; every word he wrote came from his agitated heart. It was Asa Robinson.

He had not forgotten the lovely, saucy, piquant face and the dainty little nose with its upward curve, the soft mouth, as sweet as if flower-born dew rested on it, and the warm, fearless, boyish little heart. An attar of roses clung about her memory for the reporter.

He wrote well the columns on her pitiful end, running, in romantic fashion, over her short life, "from its fated birth to its grandly mournful close." His crusty old editor, to whom kind words



were an unknown quantity, complimented him.

Poor little Babbie, did the angels tell her of her posthumous fame; of the Joan of Arc character her action had given her?

Did she know that her bravery had carried her from the hollows in the valley of life, and placed her on a mountain peak, where every eye, even the eye of her enemies, might see? That the voice of slander was silent forevermore—slander whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue outvenoms all the worms of vile?

But what cared that marble brow for laurel? What cared those motionless feet for the broken alabaster box and its spikenard contents?

Honor's voice cannot provoke the silent dust, the breath of flattery cannot soothe the dull, cold ear of death; the lustreless eye views not the pomp of banners. Honor, that pilgrim gray, could but deck the turf that wrapped the clay of the little girl.

Alone with Hannah and Ned Higgins, the father told them of Babbie's love.



"She asked me that her love might be a link to hold you two together," he said. "And she told me that if God took her to Heaven, and she could see you, she would be happier."

Then there was a silence, great as the silence of the grave.

Hannah's bosom heaved with a sob. Higgins took her work-hardened hand, kissed it reverently, and without a word, went from the house, into the green gloom of the forest.

Lines of suffering were cut into his brow as with a knife. He paused for a second by the boys' swimming pool, round about which wheeled a gaudy dragon fly. A pair of frogs splashed from the bank down to their homes in the mud.

A convolvulus vine ran wild among the grasses and weeds, its many slender tentacles holding the frail blades in an octopus grip. A band of pleasure-seeking grasshoppers did a cancan on the grass, while three showy butterflies flitted about the morning glory's cups.

A wasp, with an ominous buzz, whirled past Higgins' ear. A hoary spider



scuttled almost under his feet, looking like a bad actor in the role of King Lear. Bunches of fox-grapes thrust their laughing faces from their green attire. The blue sky, brightly peeping through the fantastic tendril garlands of the vine, showed its countenance in the water's cool.

Hours after found Higgins journeying on in the blazing sun over huge, mossy rocks, hail-hammered and rain-beaten by the winters and summers of centuries; and sharp crags, like horrid teeth; and rotten stumps, full of fungi and lichens. Here and there, bunches of scraggy ferns sprouted up.

The stones were hot under Higgins' feet. The heavens were bare of clouds, which had fled, like frightened nymphs, from the brazen sun. A bird, like a solitary ship, was sailing in the sky. Two lone flowerets, like the lost Babes in the Woods, were clinging together, their frail roots fastened in the crack of a stone.

Higgins was now miles from Farringdon.

He had fled away as a mother might flee from the empty crib of her dead child. Oh, that little grave in the churchyard which held his all!



A tinkle, like a tiny bell; he had disturbed a rattlesnake resting among the rocks, and the reptile had given fair warning. Dazed, he looked at the flashing, diamond eyes, hissing forked tongue, and coiled magnificence of the creature; then quickly seized a switch, and struck the glistening form once, twice. A distorted, agonized, twisted mass beat the rocks.

In that moment, Higgins was sorry.

"Poor wild thing," he muttered, "why didn't I leave it escape? It wouldn't have harmed me, and it warned me to keep out of danger. Well, I'll end its misery."

A few more lashes of the switch, and Higgins put his heel on the snake's head.

Then he sat on a flat rock, tossed away his hat, and looked at the heavens, as a young eagle might have done. His face was cold and hard, and full of lines, left there by his thoughts, as water congeals in the bitter wintertide.

"Murdered!" he groaned, "oh, to think she was murdered! I wish to God I knowed the skunk what done it, and he would be deader than that snake. That poor brute didn't deserve its death, though, and I wish I hadn't to



kill it. Maybe it was trying to protect its young helpless ones, like she did her ole daddy.

"But it was a glorious end for her, and it set her right with everybody, even those what didn't like her. Dominick Kennelly cried his eyes out. Such a memory as it left of her, pure and fresh and sweet, like a flower what had died. But, oh, if I could have saw her only once more, to have said only a word!"

A long pause, while in a pine tree near, the wind sobbed, like a woman weeping over the lifeless clay of one she loved.

"The Scripture says we can't do more than lay down our lives for our friends, but she did; she, and her a woman, laid down her love, and gave away her life."

Then the stoic, the strong miner, pounding the stone with hands as hard as the stone itself, fell face downward on the rock, and cried and sobbed as if his heart would break, or his throat would burst.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### YEARS LATER.

Hannah Higgins, with her broad-shouldered husband at her side, and her black-eyed little baby in her arms, stands at the gate waiting for her father. The old man takes the little girl to his breast, and she pulls his beard.

"Babbie's been a-watching for you this last hour," says the mother. "She ain't been contented with me or Ned."

The old man, happy and hearty, dandles the child; then into his eyes there comes a wistful look, as he thinks of the Babbie after whom this babe has been named; the original, fascinating, vivacious, tender-hearted, romping little hoyden who once was his Babbie, the girl who now stands in a heroine's niche, whose name is revered by the country round.

He goes into the house, leaving the husband and wife at the gate.

"The baby always makes me think of her," says the wife, pausing on the porch. "Our little one has her face and eyes and every motion of her."



"Maybe," answers the simple big husband, "she knowed when our child was leaving heaven, and coming to us, and she breathed her saint's blessing upon it. I was mighty glad the baby wasn't a boy."

"Maybe she did bless the child," says Hannah, "maybe she did."

Their eyes are on that little green spot up on the mountain side, the cemetery. Then the big husband puts his arm about his tidy wife, and silently leads her into the house.

And in the cemetery, where the birds are singing among the trees, and the hares leap about fearlessly, and the insects chirp unceasingly, and the flowers pour forth their fragrance, there with her mother sleeps the little girl who was so much calumniated, with whom everything went wrong; the girl known as poor little ill-starred Babbie.

(The End.)







# The Lily of the Coal Fields.

BY

WILL W. WHALEN.

WHEN you have had your fill of the latest "best-seller," and are weary of following the career of a much-married, much-divorced heroine, a Vampire lady, a "Bella Donna," and a "Becky Sharp" pounded into one; when you are sick to death of seeing the dame eluding the laws, and wedding her sister's second husband, him thrice divorced, skip over to the last chapter, and be done with the ravishingly lovely matron, her steadily persistent pink cheeks and her lemon-shaded hair.

Then take up "The Lily of the Coal Fields," and go back to nature and the simple life.

Sheridan devastated the Shenandoah Valley so thoroughly that it was said: "If a crow wants to fly down the Shenandoah, he must carry his provisions with him." I thought of that sentence when I was visiting the anthracite regions, so bleak and dreary was the little town with its huge barren banks of culm. Yet those black dead fields have produced "The Lily"—a heroine sweet as a "violet in a valley of moss, or a primrose beneath the shadow of an oak."

"The Lily" is an unusual novel. Everybody is more or less interested in the anthracite miners of Pennsylvania. The fiction writer has heretofore ignored the laborers in the coal fields.



Now Will W. Whalen, "the Bazin of the coal regions," born and bred amongst the miners, comes out of the East, and tells us much of their lives.

From the first chapter where "The Lily" is discovered digging a salad bed to the finale where she is found in the arms of her miner-hero, the story is fascinating. Here and there throughout the book are thought-compelling sentences. The frontispiece is a beautiful, appealing figure, drawn by Mr. F. S. Brunner, of the "Saturday Evening Post." The novel is dedicated:

"To the noble men and women who are so strenuously opposing the heaven-defying 'white slave' trade—to those friends of the pure-souled servant girls, fresh from the green innocent country; and facing the dangers of that populated, infested wilderness, the city."

*Wilfred Ferguson.*

"The narrative has an effective plot, and the tone throughout is wholesome. Primarily the story treats of a young girl living in the anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania, who is compelled by circumstances to seek a position in a large city. Her experiences there are narrated with considerable dramatic force, and her winsome manner and engaging personality make her an unusually pleasing heroine."

*Philadelphia "Press."*

"The writer gives the native wit and humor of the Irish in a very pleasant and amusing way . . . a way that is quite true to the life. The talk of the women, especially of the hero-



ine's mother, could not be better, it seems to us."

*Men & Women.*

"The story is interesting to a degree and moves along briskly, and without a single hitch to the finale which, of course, finds everything serene as the unflecked skies of May."

*Rosary.*

"There is not a dull line in the story....It is realistic without being hard or coarse...Messrs. Baer and Co., who imagine themselves possessed of a divine right to rob the miners ought to read this book."

*Boston Pilot.*

"Amid breakers and coal dust, noise of machinery, clouds of smoke and unpoetic hills of culm, the author has produced a very readable book."

*True Voice.*

"One feels the author was in dead earnest when he wrote."

*Brooklyn Tablet.*

"Most of the characters are cameos, real photographs from life. We can almost feel the breath of the admirable 'Lily' on our cheek as we pore over the page."

*Gettysburg "Chronicle."*







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